

SPIRITUAL DISCIPLINES, CHURCH, AND HOME
WESLEYAN SPIRITUAL DISCIPLINES FOR FAMILIES

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To the congregations of Jackson First United Methodist Church
and Medina First United Methodist Church
for great support and encouragement;

To my family: Jay, Joshua, and Clare
for sacrifices made, enthusiasm expressed, and assistance given,

Thanks and love to you all.

Remember also to use all means as *means*: as ordained, not for their own sake, but in order to the renewal of your soul in righteousness and true holiness.

— John Wesley, *The Means of Grace*

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God is good. All the time.

ABBREVIATIONS

FUMC First United Methodist Church

ABSTRACT

This research project was conducted to examine current research and practices surrounding spiritual disciplines in the Christian home, with particular interest in discovering whether the Wesleyan means of grace are sufficient tools for helping parents increase their abilities to be the most important spiritual influence on the religious and spiritual lives of their children.

CHAPTER ONE
MEDINA FIRST UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

Introduction

It was the middle of the night when I woke to the faint sound of shuffling. The lights in the airplane were off, and yet there was so much movement. When I finally got my bearings, I saw that the muted sounds came from Orthodox Jewish men walking to the back of the plane to pray. Most of them said nothing as they passed, but I overheard a snippet of a conversation behind me. One of my traveling companions on this pilgrimage to the Holy Land was talking to her seatmate, an Orthodox Jewish man who was taking his two oldest children to Jerusalem for the first time. It was his first time in the Holy Land, too. He interrupted his conversation with my companion to look over at his adolescent son, who was sitting several rows away and trying to get his father's attention. "Do you need me to help you with your tefillin?" he asked his son. The son nodded and the father made his way over. They went to the back of the plane together and the father helped his son wrap the cord around his forearm the correct way so that he could complete his prayers.

I wanted to freeze time, to watch that father and son prepare for prayer. I wanted to take a photograph of them in that intimate moment, the son preparing to say the same prayers that the father had already said, and that his father had been saying since he was the son's age. I longed for this kind of faith formation and communication in my own family, for an ancient way that would teach me how to have these intimate moments with

my own children without fear of losing my way or saying the wrong thing, or being embarrassed to speak about such a personal relationship between myself and my Creator.

As a pastor and parent, I am both intrigued and moved by the way that fathers and sons so unself-consciously share this religious background. I wonder if mainline Protestants, particularly United Methodists, feel this level of comfort with sharing the intricacies and intimacies of spiritual life.

Setting: The City

The welcome page on the City of Medina website states the following:

Medina, TN is located about 10 minutes northeast of Jackson, TN in Gibson County. Medina has great schools, wonderful churches and an atmosphere conducive to raising strong, healthy families. Medina is one of the fastest growing cities in West Tennessee and there's a good reason for that . . . Medina is a great place to live!¹

Medina First United Methodist Church has been in its present location on the southwest corner of Highway 45 and West Church Avenue in Medina for a little over ten years. Prior to that it was located on the east side of Highway 45 in what is now considered "Old Medina." The move was strategic. Roughly twenty years ago, a group of astute church members foresaw a boom in Medina's population as the quality of the education system in Jackson, only ten miles south, came under intense scrutiny. It seemed inevitable that families would begin to move north where their children could be educated in the Gibson County Special School District and parents could keep their jobs in Jackson or surrounding communities.

¹ "Welcome to Medina," City of Medina, TN, last modified 2016, accessed February 23, 2016, <http://www.cityofmedinatn.org/>.

The boom happened and Medina grew quickly. The City of Medina website states that “Medina is a smaller town of about 4500, but over the past couple of years, we have been experiencing a ‘growth boom’ like never before. We currently have 10 new housing sub-divisions in progress . . .”² Medina Elementary School, which once housed grades kindergarten through 8, is currently only able to accommodate children from pre-K through second grade. Third through eighth graders are all educated at Medina Middle School. The Medina Middle School homepage states that

Medina Middle School opened in Fall of 2000 hosting grades 5-8 with 243 students. Since the doors opened 9 years ago, Medina has experienced tremendous growth. The school now hosts grades 3-8 with over 1100 students. More recently, 2 new wings were added to accommodate our massive growth.³

At the beginning of the 2014-2015 school year, South Gibson County High School, the only high school serving Medina, opened up a new classroom wing to serve its 550+ students.

Setting: Medina First United Methodist Church

Medina FUMC’s location on a major highway with a large electronic sign makes it quickly noticeable. Visitors to the church come because they were invited, because they are United Methodist by birth, or because they are simply looking for a church closer to their home since their move to Medina. Despite living in the “Bible Belt,” the families in Medina experience the same cultural and social stressors that families face all over the country: travel sports teams, increasing academic pressures on children, social pressures

² City of Medina, “Welcome to Medina.”

³ “About Us,” Medina Middle School, accessed October 24, 2014, <http://www.gcssd.org/medinamiddle.cfm?subpage=1132495>.

on teenagers, and the need for two incomes in order to maintain the lifestyle to which they have become accustomed.

Medina FUMC: The Need

This project finds its inspiration in the National Study of Youth and Religion in which Christian Smith and Melinda Denton concluded that “the single most important influence on the religious and spiritual lives of adolescents is their parents. While other relatives, mentors, and youth ministers may be very influential, parents are most important in forming their children’s spirituality.”⁴

One of the most interesting dynamics in Medina is the homogeneity in the age of Medina’s residents. Nearly all of the people moving in to one of the ten housing subdivisions currently under construction, as well as those who are moving in to existing subdivisions, are families with school-aged children. In these neighborhoods there are few, if any, retired couples or empty nesters. Without the wisdom of experienced parents who have moved through the stage of life that these families are in at the moment, young families have few places to turn to learn how to be spiritual influences on their families. The church’s role in teaching parents how to become the primary spiritual influences on their children is all the more crucial.

Medina FUMC: The Project

I have chosen to focus my project on helping parents become more competent and confident primary spiritual influences in their own homes through the use of the

⁴ Kenda Creasy Dean, *Almost Christian: What the Faith of Our Teenagers Is Telling the American Church* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 203.

Wesleyan means of grace. The Wesleyan means of grace have been prescriptive in Methodism since the time of John Wesley for Christian disciples who endeavor to open themselves to the work of God in their lives.

The Wesleyan means of grace, which he defines in a sermon of the same title, are prayer, whether in secret or with the great congregation; searching the Scriptures; (which implies reading, hearing, and meditating thereon;) and receiving the Lord's Supper, eating bread and drinking wine in remembrance of Him: And these we believe to be ordained of God, as the ordinary channels of conveying his grace to the souls of men.⁵

In his sermon titled "The Scripture Way of Salvation," Wesley elaborates on the means of grace, dividing them into "works of piety" and "works of mercy." Works of piety he defines as "public prayer, family prayer, and praying in our closet; receiving the supper of the Lord; searching the Scriptures, by hearing, reading, meditating; and using such a measure of fasting or abstinence as our bodily health allows."⁶ Works of mercy are defined by Wesley as any works that affect the body or soul "such as feeding the hungry, clothing the naked, entertaining the stranger, visiting those that are in prison, or sick, or variously afflicted . . ."⁷

It is my sincere hope that the means of grace—the regular spiritual practices that John Wesley believed opened Christians to the work of God in their lives—can speak to and equip parents in a relevant way.

This project will answer the question: Will the theoretical knowledge and regular practice of those practices identified as Wesleyan means of grace increase a parent's self-reported ability to be his or her child's primary spiritual influence?

⁵ Albert C. Outler and Richard P. Heitzenrater, eds., *John Wesley's Sermons: An Anthology* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1991), 160.

⁶ Outler and Heitzenrater, *John Wesley's Sermons*, 378.

⁷ Outler and Heitzenrater, *John Wesley's Sermons*, 378.

Hypothesis

Citing research from the Search Institute, Mark Holmen states that

while mom and dad are the top influences in the faith development of their children, only 12 percent of church youth have ever talked with their mom about faith, only 5 percent of church youth have talked with their dad about faith and only 9 percent of church youth have experienced either family devotions, prayer or Bible reading in the home. And these statistics are from church families.⁸

Given such statistics, I believe that parents and stepparents of school-aged children will have a great desire to be more effective and proactive primary spiritual influences on their children. I also believe that they will want to be exposed to a curriculum that will give them the language to talk about faith with their children and that will give them practical ideas for transmitting/transferring faith in the home.

⁸ Mark Holmen and Dave Teixeira, *Take It Home: Inspiration and Events to Help Parents Spiritually Transform Their Children* (Ventura, CA: Gospel Light, 2008), 13.

CHAPTER TWO

BIBLICAL AND THEOLOGICAL FOUNDATIONS

Introduction

This chapter will explore the biblical and theological foundations of spiritual disciplines as practiced in the family unit, with a particular emphasis on spiritual disciplines in the Wesleyan tradition. It will answer the questions a) Why are spiritual disciplines important? b) What is the role of spiritual disciplines in the family? and c) What is the church's responsibility to parents as they nurture the spiritual lives of their children?

Spiritual Disciplines

Theological Implications

Perhaps one of the reasons that spiritual disciplines have not been widely embraced by Protestants is that we can easily mistake them (the spiritual disciplines) for things that we do or actions that we take in order to gain favor with God. When we approach disciplines as a means of connecting with God, however, we understand that they are not ways of earning favor with God but of making ourselves available to God.

Richard Foster, founder of Renovaré and author of multiple books about spiritual disciplines, tells us that the classical spiritual disciplines, so called because they have been considered central to the Christian life by devotional masters through the ages, are the method for moving beyond superficial living and into lives led from the depths of our souls. Why is it necessary to move beyond superficial living? In *Celebration of*

Discipline Foster tells us, “Superficiality is the curse of our age. The doctrine of instant gratification is a primary spiritual problem. The desperate need today is not for a greater number of intelligent people, or gifted people, but for deep people.”¹ Aware that some might argue that spiritual disciplines are too hard for the average Christian, Foster reminds us that “God intends the Disciplines of the spiritual life to be for ordinary human beings: people who have jobs, who care for children, who wash dishes and mow lawns. In fact, the Disciplines are best exercised in the midst of our relationships with our husband or wife, our brothers and sisters, our friends and neighbors.”²

Although he is convinced that the disciplines are meant to be practiced by all Christians, he is quick to acknowledge that many may be intimidated by the thought of entering into the disciplines. Some may doubt their ability to move beyond the physicality of the world into the spirituality of it. Others may be so unfamiliar and far-removed from the idea of disciplines that few know how to practice them anymore.³

Despite ignorance on the part of the would-be practitioner, Foster reminds us that “if we ever expect to grow in grace, we must pay the price of a consciously chosen course of action which involves both individual and group life. Spiritual growth is the purpose of the Disciplines.”⁴

Theologian and author Dallas Willard claims that *embodiment* is the basis for the spiritual disciplines. He begins his argument by reminding us that modern Christians want to be able to do what Jesus did—to behave like Christ would in the workplace or in

¹ Richard Foster, *Celebration of Discipline: The Path to Spiritual Growth* (San Francisco: HarperOne, 1998), 1.

² Foster, *Celebration of Discipline*, 1.

³ Foster, *Celebration of Discipline*, 2-3.

⁴ Foster, *Celebration of Discipline*, 8.

the home—but that we have somehow managed to divorce Christ’s public behavior from his private behavior. In other words, we want to make the same choices that Christ did and to live from a deep sense of knowing who we are and whose we are like Christ did, but we are not willing to engage in the private disciplines that Christ cultivated in his own life. Willard states that “we cannot adopt his form of life without engaging in his disciplines . . .”⁵ Willard describes the disciplines as “time-tested activities consciously undertaken by us as new men or women to allow our spirit ever-increasing sway over our embodied selves. They help by assisting the ways of God’s Kingdom to take the place of the habits of sin embedded in our bodies.”⁶

Of particular interest to United Methodists is John Wesley’s emphasis on the spiritual disciplines. The basis for a United Methodist understanding of disciplines in the Wesleyan tradition comes from Wesley’s sermon “The Means of Grace.” In it Wesley writes: “By ‘means of grace’ I understand outward signs, words, or actions ordained by God, and appointed for this end—to be the *ordinary* channels whereby he might convey to men preventing, justifying, and sanctifying grace.”⁷ Wesleyan theologian and pastor Maxie Dunnam reminds readers of Wesley’s belief that the means of grace themselves did not have any power and that using them never guaranteed that the practitioner would experience spiritual growth. The means of grace for the Christian were simply a way to make an intentional opening for God in our lives.⁸

⁵ Dallas Willard, *The Spirit of the Disciplines: Understanding How God Changes Lives* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1988), 29.

⁶ Willard, *The Spirit of the Disciplines*, 86.

⁷ Albert Outler and Richard Heitzenreiter, eds., *John Wesley’s Sermons: An Anthology*. (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1991), 160.

⁸ Maxie Dunnam, *Going on to Salvation: A Study in the Wesleyan Tradition* (Nashville: Discipleship Resources, 1990), 108.

Biblical Implications

Using his theological emphasis on embodiment as the basis of spiritual disciplines, Dallas Willard offers helpful conversation surrounding the biblical foundation of the disciplines. Willard points to 1 Timothy 4:7, stating that the spiritual disciplines are the practical way that Christians train ourselves in godliness. Willard argues that, for Paul, training in godliness would not have merely been a manner of speaking but would have been an actual regimen, much like a physical training program, that Paul undertook and expected others to undertake as well.⁹ We note a similar understanding in Paul's letter to the Galatians when he states that those who belong to Christ have "crucified the flesh with its passions and desires" (Gal 5:24).¹⁰ While we know that Paul did not speak of this crucifixion literally, it would also be inappropriate to assume that he means it in a purely symbolic way. What Paul means is that Christians are to take actual physical measures to overcome the passions and desires of our bodies.¹¹ The same can be said of Paul's letter to the church at Rome in which he urges the Roman church to "no longer present your members to sin as instruments of wickedness, but present your members to God as instruments of righteousness" (Rom 6:24). Paul is speaking specifically of changing our habits.¹²

Willard also points to the solitude of Jesus seen in the Gospels of both Matthew and Mark. In Matthew 26:38-42, Jesus is shown in the Garden of Gethsemane prior to his

⁹ Willard, *The Spirit of the Disciplines*, 95.

¹⁰ All Scripture citations are taken from the New Revised Standard Version, 1989, unless otherwise noted.

¹¹ Willard, *The Spirit of the Disciplines*, 108.

¹² Willard, *The Spirit of the Disciplines*, 114.

crucifixion, in deep and meaningful conversation with God about his plight. In Mark 1:35 we see Jesus get up early and pray in a deserted place. Several chapters later, in Mark 6, we see Jesus encouraging the disciples to come away by themselves and enjoy a meal together without interruption. And even later in the same chapter, Jesus retreats again to be by himself and to pray. Jesus was not able to live the life that he lived without opening himself up to the presence of God in his own life.¹³

These are clear theological and biblical foundations for the role of spiritual disciplines in the life of the individual Christian disciple.

Family and Faith

Theological Implications

From its beginnings, the church has emphasized the importance of family in the life of faith. While modern Christian disciples in the United States tend to understand spiritual nurture and direction to be the purview of the local church, this view is relatively new. Theologians and practitioners from the very earliest church believed that the locus of spiritual direction and instruction was the home and family.

Diana Garland outlines the evolution of the relationship between the family and the early church in *Family Ministry: A Comprehensive Guide*. According to Garland, in the ancient Near East, worship occurred in the context of the household. As households in the ancient Near East began to convert to the Way of Christ, worship remained centered in the home. By the third century, larger households in ancient Near Eastern communities

¹³ Willard, *The Spirit of the Disciplines*, 100-102.

were built with large rooms specifically to accommodate the combination of several families for worship.

In the seventh and eighth centuries, the church became more institutionalized, ensuring that household congregations worshipped in ways that were similar to each other. Prior to that, each household congregation likely had its own methods and practices. As the church evolved further, it began to place family practices and habits under its own jurisdiction and became central in blessing and maintaining family units through marriage.¹⁴

According to Vatican II, the Roman Catholic Church defines the family as the “domestic church.” This is not to say that the family is like the church or represents the church, but that the family is actually the church. The United States Catholic bishops state, “A family is our first community and most basic way in which the Lord gathers us, forms us and acts in the world. The early church expressed this truth by calling the Christian family a domestic church or church of the home.”¹⁵

In Catholic teaching, the church is not the primary place to nurture faith so that individuals can be good family members. Instead, the church is where those who are already nurtured by their families come to serve the church and the world as faithful leaders and servants. In addition, the church is to emulate the best and most faithful characteristics of family life. As a result, leaders in the Roman Catholic Church faithfully consider the impact on the entire family when planning programs and creating policies of the church. They are intentional about protecting the health and nurturing influence of

¹⁴ Diana Garland, *Family Ministry: A Comprehensive Guide* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2012), 68-71.

¹⁵ Garland, *Family Ministry*, 84.

the family since the family is the primary place where faith is nurtured and sustained, not to be disrupted or compromised by the actions or policies of the church.¹⁶

Martin Luther was the first theologian to understand parenting as a vocation in and of itself and “regarded the work of mothers and fathers as a most holy calling and obligation.”¹⁷ In fact, Luther led the Reformers in claiming that the bond between father and child is just as significant as the bond between mother and child. He rejected any notion that childrearing should be left only to the mother, insisting instead that any work undertaken by the Christian—even if that is washing a child’s diaper—pleases God if it is done so with a Christian spirit and in Christian faith. In other words, whereas parenting had, prior to Luther, been seen as a distraction from Christian devotion, Luther insisted that it was, instead, a true Christian vocation.¹⁸ Luther believed that parents were to serve their children as both apostle and bishop and that they were responsible for four critical acts in the life of each child: to provide the sacrament of baptism, to provide spiritual formation, to ensure that they were educated so that they could use God’s gifts in Christian vocation, and to help them find a spouse before they were tempted by lust beyond what they could bear.¹⁹

Luther truly believed, maybe naively, that all parents would find the formation of their children as important as he did. He assumed that parents would teach their children to pray, teach them the importance of worship, and read Scripture with them. He was disappointed much later when he visited parishes only to discover that doctrinal

¹⁶ Garland, *Family Ministry*, 84.

¹⁷ Jane E. Strohl, “The Child in Luther’s Theology: ‘For What Purpose Do We Older Folks Exist, Other Than to Care for . . . the Young?’” in *The Child in Christian Thought*, ed. Marcia Bunge (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2001), 134.

¹⁸ Garland, *Family Ministry*, 82.

¹⁹ Strohl, “The Child in Luther’s Theology,” 140-41.

knowledge among the common people, and even their pastors, was thin at best. Lest contemporary disciples fear that the twenty-first-century church has somehow moved far afield of a spiritual utopia, Luther's preface to his Small Catechism indicates his distress.²⁰

Like Luther, and in harmony with much thinking of the sixteenth century, John Calvin also understood the family as the primary arena in which children come to moral and spiritual maturity. Calvin believed that the primary duty of the father and mother are to teach godliness to their children and that good parenting can be judged by how well parents provide "instruction in piety."²¹ For Calvin, parenting was not simply divinely ordained by God but a mirror of God's own action in creating and forming all of God's children.

Although John Wesley was not a parent himself, he did deliver two sermons that are instructive regarding his views of the family. Based on Joshua 24:15, Wesley's sermon "On Family Religion" shows Wesley's emphasis on family-based instruction in the faith. He calls children "immortal spirits whom God hath, for a time, entrusted to your care, that you may train them up in holiness, and fit them for the enjoyment of God in eternity."²² In concert with Wesley's doctrinal emphasis on sanctification he suggests that the first duty of the parent is to keep the child from sinning by means of "advice, persuasion, and reproof."²³ The second duty is to provide instruction. By this he means that parents, particularly fathers, should help other family members plan their days so that

²⁰ Strohl, "The Child in Luther's Theology," 146.

²¹ Barbara Pitkin, "'The Heritage of the Lord': Children in the Theology of John Calvin," in *The Child in Christian Thought*, ed. Marcia Bunge (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2001), 173.

²² John Wesley, *Sermons on Several Occasions in Two Volumes*, vol. 2 (New York: Carlton and Lanahan, n.d.), 302.

²³ Wesley, *Sermons on Several Occasions*, 303.

all have time for the ordinances of God such as prayer, scripture reading, and meditation. Speaking in particular of children, Wesley insists that their Christian instruction should begin at home as soon as possible, as soon as they seem to understand reason. And, Wesley states, plain language should be used in instructing children so that they are not confused by the instruction but rather enlightened by it. Besides beginning instruction early and using plain language, Wesley also insists that parents teach their children frequently throughout the day and that they persevere in their instruction. If they cannot do these things, Wesley claims, then they may need to spend more time tending to their own relationship with God.²⁴

Proverbs 22:6 is the basis for Wesley's sermon "On the Education of Children." Although he addresses great many particulars of child rearing in this sermon, his primary contribution to the discussion of the role of family in faith is contained in his admonition for parents, particularly mothers, to speak of God frequently to children. He claims that parents spend far too much time talking to their children of "a thousand other things in the world that is round about them"²⁵ but hardly any time mentioning the name of God. This, he says, results in an atheism in the child that is the fault of the parent.

Biblical Implications

Theologians and scholars agree that the writings of the Old and New Testaments do not provide a unified picture of ideal family life, and that, in fact, there are few family systems in Scripture that provide examples that families should model. Lutheran

²⁴ Wesley, *Sermons on Several Occasions*, 304-6.

²⁵ Wesley, *Sermons on Several Occasions*, 311.

theologian Mark Holmen has highlighted two Scriptures in particular that provide a basis for a spirituality of the family. Deuteronomy 6:4-9 says,

Hear, O Israel: The LORD is our God, the LORD alone. You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might. Keep these words that I am commanding you today in your heart. Recite them to your children and talk about them when you are at home and when you are away, when you lie down and when you rise. Bind them as a sign on your hand, fix them as an emblem on your forehead, and write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates.

Leon Blanchette, in *A Theology for Family Ministries*, states that

the focus of Moses' instruction is obedience to the words of God, and that obedience comes when one knows and understands God's Word. . . . Moses challenges the people to hide God's words in their hearts so that the way they live their lives will match up with what they understand and confess with their mouths so they will be obedient.²⁶

He goes on to say, "The implication of verses 6 through 9 is that teaching obedience to God's commands is to be done at all times, in all places, with intention, as parents are being obedient to God's commands."²⁷ Holmen also cites Psalm 78:5-8, which reads:

He established a decree in Jacob, and appointed a law in Israel, which he commanded our ancestors to teach to their children; that the next generation might know them, the children yet unborn, and rise up and tell them to their children, so that they should set their hope in God, and not forget the works of God, but keep his commandments; and that they should not be like their ancestors, a stubborn and rebellious generation, a generation whose heart was not steadfast, whose spirit was not faithful to God.

Again, this psalm emphasizes the importance of the family in passing on the faith within the family unit. Parents, Holmen says, are of primary importance in teaching children to "know God's story, tell God's story, and be God's story, twenty-four hours a day, seven

²⁶ Leon M. Blanchette Jr., "Spiritual Markers in the Life of a Child," in *A Theology for Family Ministries*, ed. Michael Anthony and Michelle Anthony (Nashville: B&H Publishing Group), 2011, 121-22.

²⁷ Blanchette, "Spiritual Markers in the Life of a Child," 123.

days a week, beginning in their homes and extending throughout all aspects of their lives.”²⁸

Michael Lawson provides extensive evidence for the importance of families in the nurture of spiritual life. He begins by pointing to the centrality of family in the purposes of God. Not only did God create the first family in Adam and Eve, but also he preserved the family through Noah’s line after the great flood. When God made a covenant with Abraham, God intended that the covenant would be lived out through Abraham’s family. Clearly the primacy of family is part of our Christian DNA.²⁹

Lawson also argues that the entirety of the Levitical law offered parents the opportunity to nurture the faith of their children as the entire family acted out their faith year after year. From resting on the Sabbath as a family to traveling to Jerusalem for religious festivals, to selecting appropriate attire, every time the family followed the law they were providing spiritual formation and nurture throughout the entire family.³⁰ He states, “Everything connected with God and love for Him in one way or another for the devout family. No one has ever devised a more comprehensive education system to empower parents in their responsibility to raise children.”³¹

Finally, Lawson points to Joshua 4:5-7 as a mandate for parents to ensure that formation and education came primarily from the home. Joshua 4:5-7 states,

Joshua said to them, “Pass on before the ark of the Lord your God in the middle of the Jordan, and each of you take up a stone on his shoulder, one for each of the tribes of the Israelites, so that this may be a sign among you. When your children

²⁸ Mark Holmen, *Church + Home: The Proven Formula for Building Lifelong Faith* (Ventura, CA: Regal), 2010, 19.

²⁹ Michael S. Lawson, “Old Testament Teachings on the Family,” in *A Theology of Family Ministries*, ed. Michael Anthony and Michelle Anthony (Nashville: B&H Publishing Group), 2011, 70-71.

³⁰ Lawson, “Old Testament Teachings on the Family,” 76.

³¹ Lawson, “Old Testament Teachings on the Family,” 76-77.

ask in time to come, What do these stones mean to you? then you shall tell them .
..”

The purpose of the stones was clearly a teaching purpose. When the children asked what the stones meant then their parents were to answer them. Parents were not encouraged to send their children to priests for the answer but were intended to speak clearly to their children themselves about their history with their God.³²

Richard Melick points to two particular epistle texts to help readers grasp the attitude toward families communicated in the New Testament. Ephesians 5 and Colossians 3 both communicate domestic codes that are part of God’s economy. “In other words,” Melick claims, “proper family relationships evidence God’s economy within the church and to the world outside.”³³

The Church and the Family

Theological Implications

Theologian Marva Dawn perhaps gives the church the most sound counsel on why ministry to families cannot be ignored by the church. Dawn’s life work has been formulating a theology of worship, and she emphasizes the importance of worship, as well as the entire life of the Christian community, for forming Christian disciples. This carries over to the formation of children as well.

Dawn clearly argues that Christian community is necessary to provide support to parents who are in turn attempting to nurture children in a way that is authentically Christian. She argues that Christian disciples cannot adequately live the Christian life

³² Lawson, “Old Testament Teachings on the Family,” 84.

³³ Richard Melick Jr., “New Testament Teachings on the Family, in *A Theology of Family Ministries*, ed. Michael Anthony and Michelle Anthony (Nashville: B&H Publishing Group), 2011, 99.

outside of the worshiping community; thus “our children need the entire community for their growth in the life of faith, and, especially, for learning the heart of God through his Revelation.”³⁴ She goes on to say that one of the primary responsibilities of the Christian community is to live as an alternative society to culture at large, living according to God’s will for the community as revealed in Scripture and in the movement of the Holy Spirit. This ability to live within the alternative community of Christian discipleship requires deep, intentional training for children in the worshiping community, much as deep, intentional training would be required for those who are not members of the church. Dawn argues that, as a generation that expresses feelings of rootlessness, we need to approach young people with an understanding that they “need a genuine and vital community with an alternative process of life formation in order to survive and thrive.”³⁵

This nurture of children in the alternative community formed by Christ cannot be accomplished by parents alone. Dawn agrees with Holmen and Anthony that parents are primarily responsible for passing on to their children the values that undergird the Christian community. The community’s responsibility is to help parents keep God first in their lives and to ensure that parents are continually formed by God.³⁶ If parents themselves are continually formed by worship, reading Scripture, prayer, and other spiritual disciplines, they will be more equipped to share with their children what it means to be formed by Christ and by the alternative values of the Christian community.

Finally, Dawn points to the book of Deuteronomy to remind the church that the faith story that God’s people recited to their children was the story of their community

³⁴ Marva Dawn, *Is It a Lost Cause? Having the Heart of God for the Church’s Children* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans), 1997, 34.

³⁵ Dawn, *Is It a Lost Cause?*, 50-51.

³⁶ Dawn, *Is It a Lost Cause?*, 109-10.

rather than the story of one particular person. In the same way, the faith communities in which families participate bear the responsibility for helping parents tell God's story to their children.³⁷

Lutheran theologian Mark Holmen and longtime children's pastor Michelle Anthony concur with Dawn on the importance of the church's ministry to families. While Holmen clearly believes that the primary responsibility for Christian nurture and formation belongs with parents, he is also clear that the church is responsible for supporting parents in this difficult endeavor. Holmen states that "if religious life in the home influences the faith of children more than what happens in church, and if parents are two to three times more influential than any church program, shouldn't we be investing the majority of our time and resources equipping the home for being the primary place for nurturing faith?"³⁸

Michelle Anthony laments the fact that parents will quickly turn to books and videos for parenting advice but often do not turn to the church to help them with the difficult process of spiritual formation. Anthony, like Holmen, suggests that the role of the church is to give parents tools that allow them to nurture and form their children. She states that "parents must learn how to really be present with their children and to create space for contemplation and reflection in their homes."³⁹

³⁷ Dawn, *Is It a Lost Cause?*, 117.

³⁸ Holmen, *Church + Home*, 36.

³⁹ Michelle Anthony and Kit Rae, "Equipping Parents to Be Spiritual Leaders in the Home," in *A Theology of Family Ministries*, ed. Michael Anthony and Michelle Anthony (Nashville: B&H Publishing Group, 2011), 221.

Biblical Implications

Rodney Clapp, author of *Families at the Crossroads*, compellingly argues that there is no biblical blueprint for the family, although there are abundant biblical mandates for how the family should form itself in relationship to the church. Clapp argues that the household as we understand it only became a private institution in the nineteenth century with the onset of industrialization. It was at this point that the household changed from being a producing unit in and of itself to being a sanctuary to which family members would retreat after leaving it in the morning in order to be productive somewhere else. As a result, Clapp states, Christian faith was also removed from the public sphere and made into a private endeavor.⁴⁰

In contrast to the privatized notion of the family unit, Clapp points out that in the New Testament we see Jesus whose family is made up those who obey him rather than those with whom he shares DNA. Unlike the Old Testament, in which God's richest blessings were offered through family, the New Testament tells us that the family is no longer the primary institution for serving God. When Jesus creates a family, it is created from covenant rather than biology.⁴¹

Lest we believe that Clapp has nothing constructive to say about biological families as they relate to the body of Christ, he affirms that "there is nothing about family, simply as a collection of spouses and offspring that makes its members Christian. Instead, families and individuals gain a distinctive Christian identity through their

⁴⁰ Rodney Clapp, *Families at the Crossroads: Beyond Traditional & Modern Options* (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 1993), 54-65.

⁴¹ Clapp, *Families at the Crossroads*, 68-73.

participation in the church and its story.”⁴² In other words, Christian identity is developed through participation in Christ’s body, whether or not one’s biological family passes on the values of the Christian community. “The kingdom and the reality of church as first family deny the right of biological family to be the whole world for any of its members.”⁴³

If biological family and body of Christ are to be married, then the family must also be part of a Christian community, Clapp argues, in tune with Marva Dawn. If the workings of the body of Christ are only private workings, and if those dealings never require us to make public statements about who Christ is in relation to the world, then we are not the Body of Christ at all. Clapp states that Christians “have been prone to imagine that we can live privately and individually as Christians with or without the social support of the church . . . in effect, without entirely admitting it to ourselves, we let the society serve as our church.”⁴⁴ Clapp is arguing that if we are trying to live as Christians solely within the family unit, then no member of the family can be truly formed and nurtured in the way of Christ.

Finally, Clapp points to the family as a place of hospitality for the stranger in the way that God called our Old Testament forebears to a ministry of hospitality. It should not be the place where we shelter ourselves in private but where we live out the generosity that God has shown to each of us. He states that

Kingdom mission and Christian hospitality and community are not instrumental. They are not undertaken *in order* to strengthen and make families happy. The strength and happiness of families is an important thing. But it is a byproduct of

⁴² Clapp, *Families at the Crossroads*, 84.

⁴³ Clapp, *Families at the Crossroads*, 86.

⁴⁴ Clapp, *Families at the Crossroads*, 157.

service to a kingdom larger than the family, not the object of service to that kingdom. To be healthy, the family needs a mission or purpose beyond itself.⁴⁵

Conclusion

Spiritual disciplines and practices are an integral part of the life of any disciple of Christ, and of the lives of any who want to raise children to be disciples of Christ. Unfortunately, many families leave the spiritual nurture of their children to church professionals rather than understanding that the responsibility is theirs. This is not the fault of families. They have been asked to surrender their children to ministry professionals, and the church has failed to equip them for faith formation at home. In the United Methodist Church, however, there appears to be a push toward reclaiming the Wesleyan spiritual disciplines as a means of lay renewal in the church. If this is to be successful, however, it may behoove us as a denomination to consider how we are teaching our children to be intentional in their practice of the disciplines.

⁴⁵ Clapp, *Families at the Crossroads*, 163.

CHAPTER THREE

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Introduction

There is ample literature to address the practice of spiritual disciplines within families. Some of the literature is strictly theoretical. Other scholars and practitioners have outlined concrete programs that parents, grandparents, and stepparents can use to practice spiritual disciplines in the family context. This review of literature on spiritual practices in the home will begin with those works that address the importance of practicing spiritual disciplines in the context of family and will continue with works that help family members learn how to practice those disciplines together.

Spiritual Disciplines and Families: Theory

Intentionality in the Negotiation of Multiple Worlds

The most comprehensive discussion of spiritual disciplines practiced in families comes from Bonnie Miller-McLemore. In her article, “Heard and Seen: The Challenge of Religious Formation in Families,” McLemore traces the evolution of society’s understanding of children from the premodern view of children as *imperfect in a fallen world* (children are fallen just as everyone and everything else in creation), to the modern view of children as *perfectible in an imperfect world* (with enough insight and education, we can perfect children), and finally to the current, postmodern understanding of children as *imperfect, even potentially volatile, in an imperfect, volatile world* (children are complex beings and live in a complex world). Parents are not prepared to raise children in

a world where both children and their environments are so complex. They are not prepared, she argues, to raise children in a world where children are violent to other children, or where children are shot while they are at school. Miller-McLemore points out that when parents believe that they can address the needs of children simply by gaining more understanding and insight in their children and into the world, these parents may assume that they do not also have to be responsible for the moral and spiritual development of their children.¹

Research bears out this assumption. Miller-McLemore argues that “authors who explore respective traditions’ responses to family change in the last half-century document the slow decrease in an array of devotional practices.”² She specifically cites three articles found in *Faith Traditions in the Family*, a collection of essays edited by Phyllis Airhart and Margaret Bendroth. William Garrett, who researched family devotional practices in the Reformed tradition, states that “parents of the baby-boomer generation, especially the ‘lay liberals,’ were considerably less likely than previous generations to impose their particular religious beliefs on their children.”³ He also cites a study showing that, in the families of baby boomers, “active church participation apparently did not result in familial Bible study, devotions, or prayer sessions . . . gone was the earlier tradition of the family altar that was ardently promoted by Presbyterians throughout the eighteenth, nineteenth, and early twentieth centuries.”⁴

¹ Bonnie Miller-McLemore, “Heard and Seen: The Challenge of Religious Formation in Families,” in *Religious Education of Boys and Girls*, ed. Werner Jeanrond and Lisa Sowle Cahill (London: SCM Press, 2002), 48-49.

² Miller-McLemore, “Heard and Seen,” 49.

³ William R. Garrett, “Presbyterian: Home Life as Christian Vocation in the Reformed Tradition,” in *Faith Traditions and the Family*, ed. Phyllis D. Airhart and Margaret Lamberts Bendroth (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1996), 121.

⁴ Garrett, “Presbyterian: Home Life as Christian Vocation,” 121.

Christine Firer Hinze, writing about devotional practices in Catholic families, contrasts family practice before and after the Second Vatican Council in 1962. Before the Second Vatican Council, families regularly attended Mass on Sunday and on other holy days, ensured that fasting rules were followed in the home, and participated in devotional practices such as the home rosary.⁵ After the Second Vatican Council, however, and as a result of the social changes of the 1960s, “structured, individually focused devotions such as the rosary gave way somewhat to free-form, interpersonal practices like spontaneous group prayers before meals or bedtime, or ‘prayer groups’ rather than Altar and Rosary Guilds.”⁶

Writing about Methodism, Jean Miller Schmidt and Gail Murphy-Geiss state that in the mid-nineteenth century, rituals of family worship were present in Methodist homes and that these rituals “contributed to the separation and protection of domestic life from worldly influences.”⁷ Since the focus of the essay is the evolution of the understanding of “family” in the United Methodist Church, Schmidt and Murphy-Geiss do not trace a change in family devotional practices. However, rituals of family worship are not specifically prescribed by the United Methodist Church in the twenty-first century.

In response the research cited above, Miller-McLemore poses the question, “Is the kind of Christianity practiced among the educated suburban middle class sufficient to the contemporary challenge of child rearing?”⁸

⁵ Christine Firer Hinze, “Catholic: Family Unity and Diversity within the Body of Christ,” in *Faith Traditions and the Family*, ed. Phyllis D. Airhart and Margaret Lamberts Bendroth (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1996), 57.

⁶ Hinze, “Catholic: Family Unity and Diversity,” 65.

⁷ Jean Miller Schmidt and Gail E. Murphy-Geiss, “Methodist: ‘Tis Grace Will Lead Us Home,” in *Faith Traditions and the Family*, ed. Phyllis D. Airhart and Margaret Lamberts Bendroth (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1996), 86-87.

⁸ Miller-McLemore, “Heard and Seen,” 50.

Miller-McLemore believes that religious vocabulary introduced and sustained through Bible study and religious conversation in the home equips families to think and speak theologically about the foundational beliefs that guide their choices and decisions. She indicates that parents need specific suggestions for family religious practices, and that churches need to cooperate continuously and reliably with families as they go about the business of raising children. Building on the research of Merton Strommen, founder of the Youth and Family Institute at Augsburg College, she states that “a critical part of a congregation’s ministry should be more specific instruction and concrete expectations for family practices that pick up on the focus of worship and education curriculum within the church.”⁹

Miller-McLemore’s research leaves little room for doubt about the needs of parents raising children in the twenty-first century. According to Miller-McLemore, this project will need to provide parents with specific suggestions for family practices and will need to address the responsibility of churches in providing parents with such suggestions on a regular basis. If this project follows Miller-McLemore to her logical conclusion, it will also be important to emphasize the need for the family unit to become familiar with religious vocabulary as a tool for faith conversations, and this is best accomplished by Bible study and religious conversation. Given the scope of this project, Miller-McLemore’s recommendations are feasible and should be included.

Sara Wenger Shenk emphasizes parental intentionality in passing on faith to children in *Why Not Celebrate?* Shenk maintains that traditional Christian stories and symbols—utilized in a thoughtful way through ritual—tell children who they are, where

⁹ Miller-McLemore, “Heard and Seen,” 52.

they fit in the family, and where they fit in the larger story of faith. She asserts that the story that Scripture tells us is full of difficult questions and mysteries. When families know that even God's story in Scripture is full of hard questions, they are also empowered and encouraged to ask hard questions about their own lives.¹⁰

Family disciplines are important according to Shenk, because family disciplines give parents the opportunity to share with their children a lived experience rather than a received doctrine. She states that "family worship rituals lead us toward an experience of the mystery of God's transcendence which, in our efforts to explain God, we have neglected to our own detriment."¹¹ Family disciplines invite participation rather than observation; participation in such disciplines forms families that are able to choose a nonconformist stance toward life. Through family worship, these families also practice eschatology by imagining what the world will be like when Christ redeems all of creation, and imagining how they can live out that redemption in their own families now.¹²

The preponderance of Shenk's book is a collection of daily, weekly, yearly, and seasonal acts of worship that are easily accessible to families and particularly helpful for parents who may not currently have the language or confidence to talk about God with their children. Perhaps the greatest value in Shenk's work is her emphasis on family worship as a lived experience rather than a received doctrine. While family worship will not be part of this project, Shenk's emphasis on the intentionality of family spiritual practice is critical to the final project.

¹⁰ Sara Wenger Shenk, *Why Not Celebrate?* (Intercourse, PA: Good Books, 1987), 7-10.

¹¹ Shenk, *Why Not Celebrate?*, 10.

¹² Shenk, *Why Not Celebrate?*, 13.

Karen-Marie Yust also emphasizes the need for spiritual disciplines as parents guide their children to resist “those aspects of our American culture that have already disappointed us with empty promises and stress-inducing side effects.”¹³ Yust acknowledges the position of some scholars who believe that children under the age of twelve are unable to engage in spiritual life in any meaningful way, but she asserts that “seeking after and being sought after by God is a lifelong process.”¹⁴ If faith is an act of grace in which God has chosen to be in relationship with humanity, says Yust, and if even the youngest children are human, then God has chosen to be in relationship with them and they have legitimate spiritual lives.¹⁵ Thus, Yust insists, children are actual people of faith rather than potential people of faith. While children’s expressions of faith are not identical to adults’ expressions of faith, she maintains, children’s expressions are no less valuable. Society has simply trained us to believe that adult expressions of faith are optimal.¹⁶ “Our role,” she maintains, “as parents and adults who work with children, is to introduce and support spiritual practices that serve to mix and knead faith into the dough of children’s lives.”¹⁷

But this is not simply a feel-good affirmation of children’s spirituality. Rather, Yust’s primary concern is similar to that of Miller-McLemore and Shenk. Like them, she believes that practices are necessary for helping children negotiate their place in the wider culture and their place in the community of faith. In speaking about the culture of the local community, Yust states, “I don’t have to wonder whether this culture will

¹³ Karen-Marie Yust, *Real Kids, Real Faith: Practices for Nurturing Children’s Spiritual Lives* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2004), xxiii.

¹⁴ Yust, *Real Kids, Real Faith*, xxiii.

¹⁵ Yust, *Real Kids, Real Faith*, 4.

¹⁶ Yust, *Real Kids, Real Faith*, 10.

¹⁷ Yust, *Real Kids, Real Faith*, 10.

influence my children's lives; my concern has to be with how much power this culture has relative to the second culture—that of our religious community. I have to help my children negotiate the overlaps and tension of these two worlds.”¹⁸

Parents who are interested in learning about practicing spiritual disciplines in the home will likely already be convinced that Yust is correct in her thesis that our children live in two worlds, and that the job of parents is to help children negotiate the tensions of those two worlds. This will not have to be emphasized in this project.

What is of great value is Yust's statement that spiritual disciplines need not be reserved for those who have reached the age of reason but are for the youngest children and the oldest adults alike. This project will include parents-to-be and parents of infants, as well as parents of children who may be old enough to understand the practice of spiritual disciplines.

Like Miller-McLemeore, Shenk, and Yust, Marjorie Thompson claims that children's spirituality is the “primal reality of life”¹⁹ in *Family the Forming Center*. As such, Thompson argues, families must do all that they can to influence that spirituality. Thompson contends that the “family and church will want to do all they can to ensure that . . . the kind of formation inevitably taking place within family life will be positive, life-giving, and constructive”²⁰ and that “the spiritual formation that occurs will move family members toward the likeness of Christ and the vision of God's reign, rather than toward conformity to the values and vision of the world.”²¹ To this end, Thompson

¹⁸ Yust, *Real Kids, Real Faith*, 28.

¹⁹ Marjorie J. Thompson, *Family the Forming Center: A Vision of the Role of Family in Spiritual Formation* (Nashville: Upper Room Books, 1996), 19.

²⁰ Thompson, *Family the Forming Center*, 21.

²¹ Thompson, *Family the Forming Center*, 21.

claims that spiritual formation within the family unit will both take advantage of natural opportunities for formation and will also be intentional about practices.

In the same way that Yust emphasized the role of practices in helping children negotiate their lives in two cultures, Thompson names challenges to the vision of moving toward Christlikeness and citizenship in God's kingdom. The practices that she offers for families who want to negotiate those challenges are prayer, family worship, storytelling, and service.

The common theme running through these four works is that they all assert the necessity of spiritual practices in the family for parents who want to help their children negotiate their dual citizenship in the prevailing society and in God's kingdom. All acknowledge that the Christian narrative is diametrically opposed to the values of western culture and that families cannot simply expect children to passively absorb the values of God's kingdom. Rather, they must be intentional about immersing their children in the Christian story and helping their children make that story their own. All of them call for parents to honestly assess the difficulties of raising children in a culture that is vastly different than those cultures in which the parents were raised. They all ask parents to acknowledge that if children are going to be citizens of the Kingdom, then parents will have to be intentional about inviting them to live in that Kingdom.

These works will be particularly helpful in any part of the project that will require explaining the importance of the intentionality of spiritual disciplines practiced in the context of family.

Family Worship

In *A Way in the World*, Ernest Boyer likens spirituality to the edge of a wheel in relation to its center. In his illustration, the edge of the wheel is occupied by those who find their spirituality in solitude, while the center is populated by those who meet God in the ordinariness of family life. He suggests that there are three ways that men and women can find a means to spiritual discipline within the complexities of family life. They are 1) turning activity inward, 2) turning the inward into activity, and 3) turning to others in celebration. Turning activity inward, Boyer suggests, is epitomized by using activity as a basis for prayer in the way of Brother Lawrence. Turning the inward into activity, Boyer says, is taking the love which inhabits the heart and performing acts and work from the basis of that love. In this model, any act or work done from love is an act of worship, which turns all of life into a great act of praise. The third model that he outlines is the one that he promotes. In this model, the family turns to others in celebration as embodied in a family worship service.²² He recommends that Christian families rediscover the possibility of family worship by “searching out symbols that epitomize life at the center and reviving models that Christianity has forgotten.”²³

Of great value to the conversation surrounding spiritual disciplines within the family is Boyer’s acknowledgement that each family member may connect to the Divine in a different way than every other family member, and that each of those ways should be honored. While some find their spiritual growth best nurtured in solitude, others find their spiritual growth nurtured in serving others. Boyer suggests that individual family

²² Ernest Boyer Jr., *A Way in the World: Family Life as Spiritual Discipline* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1984), 101.

²³ Boyer, *A Way in the World*, 101.

members should nurture their own spiritual growth in the ways that have the most integrity to them, but that all family members can come together in the center where symbols that help them shape their relationships to one another and to the Trinity can be used in worship.²⁴

Family worship is not integral to the Wesleyan model of spiritual disciplines, which emphasizes congregational worship as the central activity of the Christian life. While Boyer is certainly not suggesting that families abandon congregational worship for the practice of family worship, his emphasis on family worship could lead parents to believe that such abandonment is legitimate.

The great value of Boyer's work is his acknowledgement that family members may nurture their spirituality in varied ways. This project will emphasize the importance of families taking the time to discover the way that each family member nurtures spirituality and how each way can be honored.

A Church and Home Partnership

There exists another body of literature that highlights the need for the church to partner with parents to create the optimal situation for children to be engaged in spiritual formation. This body of literature is epitomized by Reggie Joiner's book *Think Orange*. Joiner shares the following statistic that emphasizes the need of the church to partner with the family for the sake of the spiritual lives of children: "Even though two out of three parents of children under the age of eighteen attend religious services at least once a month, the **majority** of parents do not spend any time during a typical week discussing

²⁴ Boyer, *A Way in the World*, 106-8.

spiritual issues.”²⁵ Joiner encourages church leaders to assume that parents are asking for three things every time they come to church. First, parents want a plan that will help them be proactive in the spiritual lives of their children. Second, parents want a clear way forward in engaging the spiritual lives of their children. Finally, parents want specific instructions about how to influence the spiritual lives of their children.²⁶

Joiner’s primary concern in *Think Orange* is to highlight the church’s role in partnering with parents so that children are equally influenced by both church and home. He does not prescribe any particular programs or activities (other than the Orange curriculum) but encourages churches to create their own strategies for partnering with families. For purposes of this project, Joiner does outline five faith skills “children and teenagers need to be able to do so they can own their faith and make it personal.”²⁷ Those are navigating the Bible to learn where verses and stories are located, personalizing Scripture in memorization and application, dialoguing with God, articulating faith, and worshiping with life.

Like *Think Orange*, *Take It Home* by Mark Holmen and Dave Teixeira is also addressed to churches seeking to empower parents to be the primary spiritual influences on their children. Unlike *Think Orange*, however, *Take It Home* does prescribe programs and activities for churches to use. The purpose of the *Take It Home* guide is to “give your church a beginning framework for a family ministry that can be woven into your existing ministry with children and youth that will equip the home to once again be the primary

²⁵ Reggie Joiner, *Think Orange* (Colorado Springs, CO: David C Cook, 2009), 86.

²⁶ Joiner, *Think Orange*, 90.

²⁷ Joiner, *Think Orange*, 194.

place where faith is nurtured.”²⁸ The authors provide a framework for conversations among church leaders about nurturing parents in their parental roles, and between leaders and their congregations about the spiritual role of parents in the home. They then provide outlines for thirteen age-appropriate events for churches to engage in that empower parents to nurture the faith of their children at home.

For example, they outline an event addressing family devotions that is focused on families with three-year-olds.²⁹ The event begins by bringing families together to consider what it means to be devoted to something, continues with a fun and interactive way to talk about how families can make family devotion times successful, and includes a family devotional calendar to take home.

The work of Joiner, Holmen, and Teixeira assumes that it is the church’s responsibility to educate parents about their roles as primary spiritual influences and then to equip them to *be* primary spiritual influences. This project also begins with the same assumption and will demonstrate the need for churches not only to encourage parents to be their children’s primary spiritual influences but also to equip them for that role.

Spiritual Disciplines and Families: Practices

Scholars and practitioners have not only considered the theory and theology behind practicing spiritual disciplines as a family but also have identified particular disciplines that lend themselves to family use. These practitioners have also formulated different ways of practicing the disciplines within the family. Such literature may help

²⁸ Mark Holmen and Dave Teixeira, *Take It Home: Inspiration and Events to Help Parents Spiritually Transform Their Children* (Ventura, CA: Gospel Light, 2008), 13.

²⁹ Holmen and Teixeira, *Take It Home*, 71.

parents become more confident in their ability to become the primary spiritual influences on their children.

Much of the work cited above includes particular practices for family use. The bulk of Sara Wenger Shenk's book consists of rituals that families can adopt for use in the home. She includes more rituals than any one family could possibly use, the benefit of which is that there are an ample number for families to choose from. Shenk begins by outlining daily rituals such as breakfast traditions, mealtime rituals, after-dinner traditions, and bedtime rituals. She moves on to weekly rituals such as family meeting nights, and then on to yearly festivities. The traditions and rituals follow the liturgical calendar, beginning with Advent, and allow the family practices to follow the timeline of the larger family of faith. The yearly activities also include some secular observances such as back-to-school and birthday celebrations. She concludes with occasional rituals such as forgiveness and healing, and the blessing of a home.

This collection offers wonderfully creative ideas and rituals for use in the home and would be particularly valuable to parents seeking to try something new. That it follows the liturgical year would also be helpful for families from the Anglo-Catholic traditions, such as United Methodism. It provides celebrations and practices that address three of the four means of grace outlined by Wesley: fasting, prayer, and worship. It does not, however, offer much in the way of theory or instruction and thus should only be used as a supplement to more robust instruction on spiritual disciplines.

Karen-Marie Yust does not divide *Real Kids, Real Faith* into separate sections dedicated to theory and practice but instead weaves practical suggestions into her theories of children's spirituality. As cited above, Yust's primary concern is populating the entire

life of the child—or at least those parts influenced by parents—with spiritual significance. Five primary practices emerge for parents who intend to create such a spiritual world. They are storytelling, helping children name God’s presence in their lives, prayer, spiritual reflection, and service.

Yust builds on the work of Walter Brueggemann to share five aspects of story-linking. Story-linking, according to Anne Wimberly, is the way that “persons connect components of their everyday life with the Christian faith story found in scripture.”³⁰ According to Brueggemann, the five aspects of story-linking are “receiving the spiritual story of love and redemption through the compassionate care of their parents and faith community,”³¹ regularly hearing the faith story in connection with the story of their daily lives, using special holidays and actions to celebrate their stories of faith, telling others spiritual stories in their own words (including telling God in prayer), and acting in just and compassionate ways in order to become the faith story.³² Yust continues by giving concrete examples for families seeking to help children receive, hear, celebrate, tell, and become the story.

The practice of helping children name God’s presence in their lives addresses the need for children to learn the language of faith. Yust states, “The easiest way to be immersed in a spiritual language is to participate as a family in the worship life of a faith community.”³³ Telling stories helps children learn the vocabulary of their particular faith traditions, as does studying religious language more formally. Yust warns against using complex sentence structures, flat intonations, complicated phrases, and authoritarian

³⁰ Yust, *Real Kids, Real Faith*, 42.

³¹ Yust, *Real Kids, Real Faith*, 43.

³² Yust, *Real Kids, Real Faith*, 43.

³³ Yust, *Real Kids, Real Faith*, 70.

delivery of religious truth as they can “stymie spiritual formation.”³⁴ Instead, she states, religious language should be clear, rich, concrete, and critical.³⁵ The remaining pages of this particular chapter unpack the ways that parents can ensure that their use of religious language meets these criteria.

Yust begins her chapter on prayer with a focus on silent prayer, including centering prayer, meditative prayer, and guided meditation. She includes the biblical story of Solomon as a guided meditation. She continues the chapter with prayers of lament and includes a guide to the five components of lament. Yust concludes the chapter with discussions that focus on prayers of praise, confession and forgiveness, supplication, intercession, thanksgiving, and discipleship. She also includes a checklist to help families track the forms of prayer that they have used during the week so that they can intentionally balance the types of prayer that they have used.

Yust’s chapter on spiritual reflection focuses on helping parents facilitate God talk that is developmentally appropriate for their children, including posing questions about faith for children to explore. She concludes the chapter with a discussion of bodily and intuitive forms of knowing, claiming that “spiritual awareness is not only a function of study and cognitive insight.”³⁶ She then outlines multiple prayer postures that children might want to use.

Yust’s final chapter focuses on service. Claiming that “spirituality isn’t simply in our minds and hearts. It is also in our relationships with other people and in our actions in the world,”³⁷ Yust emphasizes the need for parents to help children find a balance

³⁴ Yust, *Real Kids, Real Faith*, 83.

³⁵ Yust, *Real Kids, Real Faith*, 83.

³⁶ Yust, *Real Kids, Real Faith*, 139.

³⁷ Yust, *Real Kids, Real Faith*, 143.

between the interior life and acts of compassionate service. Activities that she suggests include compassion actions, acts of justice, being different from the surrounding culture, and cultivating friendships with those who are also different from the surrounding culture.

Yust has written this book for parents and small groups of parents who seek to include spiritual disciplines in family life. The content is excellent and her practical suggestions are rich. However, it has a sharp academic bent to it that will likely make it inaccessible to many parents. This project will offer parents the chance to utilize practices included in the book, but only as part of more accessible instruction on spiritual disciplines.

Marjorie Thompson claims that “Christian spiritual formation requires conscious choice and a responsive awareness to the presence of the risen Lord in all of life.”³⁸ To that end she offers four broad themes for intentional spiritual practice within the family: prayer, family worship, storytelling, and serving. Thompson recommends that parents introduce children to multiple ways of praying, including conversational prayer, imaginative prayer or visualization, and breath prayer. She also recommends allowing children to experiment with different postures while praying and concludes by emphasizing the importance of honoring each person’s need for solitude and time to listen to God.

Family worship, according to Thompson, is a way for the family to celebrate God’s presence in their lives. She recommends family worship on a regular basis using simple symbols meaningful to the family that will remind the family of God’s activity in

³⁸ Thompson, *Family the Forming Center*, 21.

its life, particularly at morning and evening prayer. She then suggests rituals to coincide with the liturgical year, as well as rituals to commemorate particular events such as baptisms, weddings, and funerals.

Thompson stresses the importance of making children familiar with the biblical story, but not necessarily by requiring everyone to sit around the table together while someone reads from a traditional translation. Instead, she offers the possibility that children might act out the biblical story, or, when children become familiar enough with a story, paraphrase it for the family. The key to this practice is helping children to hide God's Word in their hearts. She stresses the importance of the psalms as children learn language to talk about great joy and deep pain. Familiarity with these songs gives children the assurance that they are not the first to be thankful or sorrowful. When families emphasize the centrality of Scripture, they can call upon it as they practice discernment in their life together.

Finally, Thompson offers the family home as the primary place where children learn to be good stewards of all that they have. The family informs the way that children care for the earth and teaches them how and when to use money and other resources. Parents model for children how others outside of the family are welcomed into the home as the neighbor that God has given them to love. They also teach children how to reach beyond themselves in mission, first with works of mercy and then with works of justice.

Like Yust's work, Thompson's work will likely benefit individuals who are already familiar with the language of spiritual disciplines and faith formation more than it will benefit those who are only themselves learning what it means to nurture the life of the spirit. As mentioned before, this project will not include family worship as family

worship does not receive emphasis in the Wesleyan tradition. However, Thompson's reflection on storytelling as a way to read and discover Scripture will be a good element to include in the project.

Ernest Boyer, who promotes family worship, provides three short worship services. They are *A Service for the Night*, *A Service to Welcome the Day*, and *Inauguration of the Sabbath*. Each of these includes responsive readings for families to use in worship, and two of them include a simple song that the family might sing together. He also provides general guidelines for family worship for use by families who would like to craft their own worship services.

Elizabeth Caldwell introduces practices for families in a chapter of her text, *Making a Home for Faith*, called "A Faithful Ecology at Home, at Church, and in the World." In this chapter she offers a comprehensive set of practices for the seasons of a family's life. She offers a set of daily rituals that includes blessings for meals, telling and reading Bible stories, and bedtime books and prayer. Seasonal rituals include paying attention to nature and following its lead in serving each other. For example, after the spring thaw, families might choose to help an elderly neighbor clean up her yard.³⁹ She offers suggestions for rituals that honor loss, as well as rituals that would be special for a particular family. These include traveling rituals and rituals to practice when family members leave and then return home.

Next, Caldwell offers ways that families can connect their own spiritual practices with the liturgical calendar. These include asking family members to tell the stories of their baptisms as they celebrate Pentecost. She also provides ideas for connecting the

³⁹ Elizabeth Caldwell, *Making a Home for Faith: Nurturing the Spiritual Life of Your Children* (Cleveland, OH: The Pilgrim Press, 2000), 83.

Sabbath with the way we live our lives throughout the week. Some of these ideas include reading the lectionary texts for the following Sunday and practicing the prayers and responses used in worship.⁴⁰

Since Caldwell's primary goal in the text is to help parents become more intentional about their own spiritual identity and growth, her concrete examples are limited. She does however include an entire chapter of resources that parents can reference if they want additional help considering their own spiritual practices or discerning how to help their children develop spiritual practices.

Caldwell's example of first encouraging parents to understand and use spiritual disciplines is of great value and will be included as an element of this project. This is also a book that would be beneficial for parents to read on their own.

In *Habits of a Child's Heart*, Valerie Hess and Marti Garlett outline twelve spiritual practices for families based on the classic disciplines included in Richard Foster's *Celebration of Discipline*. These practices are meditation, prayer, fasting, study, confession, guidance, simplicity, solitude, submission, service, worship, and celebration. Each of the twelve chapters begins with two sections addressed specifically to parents. In the "Understanding the Discipline" section, the authors explain the purpose of the discipline and explain its role in the life of the disciple. In the "Practicing the Discipline" section, the authors offer instruction to parents for practicing. Finally, each chapter concludes with a section called "Teaching the Discipline." This section not only instructs parents on teaching the discipline to children but is also broken down into age groups so that parents can choose the most appropriate practice for their children. For example, in

⁴⁰ Caldwell, *Making a Home for Faith*, 92-93.

the chapter addressing meditation, the authors suggest that a parent with a child in the 4-7 age range (Early Childhood) might play music familiar to the child while the child remains still and listens to the words. When the song ends, the parent might ask the child to talk about what came to mind while the music was playing. For a parent with a child in the 8-11 age range (Middle Childhood), the parent might practice *lectio divina* with the child, using an active story from the Bible. Finally, a parent with a child in the 12-15 age range (Adolescence) might encourage that child to read a Bible story at a slow and intentional pace.⁴¹

The book concludes with instructions for making a master calendar for the family to use as they practice the disciplines together.

The great value of this book is that it is based on the classical Christian disciplines as outlined by Richard Foster with specific suggestions for use in families, and will influence this project in several ways. First, the project will emphasize the need for parents to be both practitioners and teachers within the home as the family learns to use spiritual disciplines. Next, the project will emphasize four of the classical spiritual disciplines identified by Wesley as the means of grace.

Making Sunday Special by Karen Burton Mains focuses on preparing the family for the experience of Sunday worship and observing the Sabbath. This practice is based on the Jewish Sabbath and the two commands to “observe” the Sabbath and “remember” the Sabbath.⁴² She explains that for Orthodox Jewish families, anticipation of the Sabbath

⁴¹ Valerie Hess and Marti Watson Garlett, *Habits of a Child's Heart: Raising Your Kids with the Spiritual Disciplines* (Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 2004), 27-34.

⁴² Karen Burton Mains, *Making Sunday Special* (Waco, TX: Word Books, 1987), 26.

celebration begins on Wednesday, and the joy of remembering the Sabbath continues until the following Tuesday.⁴³

Mains begins by outlining how her family prepares for the Sabbath by sharing an Order of Worship for the Saturday evening meal adapted from the Jewish Shabbat meal. In the chapter following she presents a broad outline for a family that would like to create its own Saturday evening “Lord’s Day Eve” ritual, suggesting that different family members might take responsibility for planning a particular piece, and assuring readers that each meal need not be a feast. The point, she emphasizes, is that it prepares the family to look for Christ in the act of worship on the following day.

In the chapter titled “Getting Organized,” Mains lays out her preparation for the worship event on Sunday. She states that she tries to have all of the “physical preparations completed for Sunday by Saturday afternoon,”⁴⁴ and that she tries to have “all the physical preparations readied as though Christ were going to be a special guest in our home.”⁴⁵ According to Mains, all of the preparations throughout the week prepare her and her family to focus on meeting Christ in the act of worship on Sunday morning.

One of the unique contributions of Mains’s work is the inclusion of several “helps” for the family as they aspire to follow a rhythm in which Sunday is the focus of the week, and in which every other day is an anticipation of the coming Sunday or a remembrance of the previous Sunday. One of these helps is a calendar that allows for participants to note in the three days leading up the Sunday, “I’ll make this coming Sunday special for you, Jesus, by . . .” and to note in the three days following Sunday,

⁴³ Mains, *Making Sunday Special*, 21.

⁴⁴ Mains, *Making Sunday Special*, 65.

⁴⁵ Mains, *Making Sunday Special*, 65.

“Jesus, here’s what I’ll carry in my heart from this last Sunday . . .”⁴⁶ The second of the helps is a checklist of activities that participants use to prepare themselves for Sunday worship. The third help is a check-off chart of ideas to help the participant recognize Christ’s presence in Sunday worship. These ideas are divided into things that happen during the week (“I have prayed about inviting a friend who would benefit from being with me in Christ’s presence”), things that happen on Saturday (“I have determined to get to bed early so I will be refreshed and ready for church tomorrow”), and things that happen on Sunday (“I have gotten up in plenty of time so I will not feel rushed”). Finally, she includes a chart for the participant to record his or her Sunday Search. This allows the participant to note how Christ spoke to them, how Christ spoke through them, and with whom they talked about those experiences.

Worship will likely be the means of grace that is most frustrating to families because families with young children often struggle to get to church with an intact attitude of worship. Mains’s helps will be a central part of this project as we focus on the discipline of worship.

Mark Holmen has done extensive work in the area of equipping parents to be the primary spiritual influences on their children. Two of his books, *Faith Begins at Home* and *Take It Home*, offer valuable helps to parents learning how to nurture children in faith and churches who are helping parents learn how to nurture their children in faith.

Faith Begins at Home consists of five short chapters that focus on what Holmen calls “makeovers.” In each chapter Holmen offers activities that lead to a “makeover” of that particular aspect of the family’s life. For example, in the chapter titled “The Home

⁴⁶ Mains, *Making Sunday Special*, 105.

Makeover,” Holmen provides a template for the blessing of the home, a suggested activity in which the family puts post-in notes in different parts of the house reminding them to ask themselves “What Would Jesus Have Me Do?” and a suggestion for creating a family mission statement. Other makeovers include a parent makeover, a child makeover, an extended family makeover, and a church makeover. Holmen concludes each chapter with a set of discussion questions for those using the book in a small group setting. The suggestions in this text may be particularly helpful for beginning discussions with parents who seek to be more intentional primary spiritual influences on their children. The same is true for Holmen’s *Take It Home*. Holmen, however, includes children in the instructions to parents about spiritual disciplines, which will not likely be part of this project.

Diana Garland’s *Sacred Stories of Ordinary Families* is a result of her research into the observation that “when families were faced with crises . . . those who seemed to weather the crisis best were those who had an active spiritual dimension to their life together and who belonged to faith communities.”⁴⁷ She ultimately set out to answer the question: “What characterizes faith and spirituality in family life?”⁴⁸

Garland listened to the stories of families together to determine how congregations might grow into places where families can share their stories of faith together. Garland structures the fifth chapter of the book, “The Challenging Practices of Living Faith,” around twelve faith practices identified by Craig Dykstra and others. These twelve practices are worshiping God together, telling and reading the Christian story

⁴⁷ Diana Garland, *Sacred Stories of Ordinary Families: Living the Faith in Daily Life* (San Francisco: Jossey Bass, 2003), xiii.

⁴⁸ Garland, *Sacred Stories of Ordinary Families*, xiii.

together, sharing with one another our interpretations of the Bible, having patience with one another, praying together and by ourselves, serving others as a means of serving God, giving generously, welcoming others into our homes, listening and talking attentively and empathetically, seeking to identify and resist systems and powers that harm people, working with others to create systems that are in accordance with God's will, and confessing our sins to one another in order to restore broken relationships.⁴⁹

Garland does not provide programming suggestions for families seeking to use these twelve faith practices in their family life. Instead she lets families tell their own stories of living out these faith practices in their own contexts. As an example, Garland shares that “over and over, families told me that participation in the worship and programs of their congregation is the most significant way they are intentionally practicing their faith as families.”⁵⁰

Garland seems to be less concerned with equipping parents to be the primary spiritual influences on their children and more concerned with encouraging families to be intentional about their life of faith together, à la Yust, Miller-McLemore, Shenk, and Thompson. She includes two guides in the book, one for family discussion and one for congregational discussion. In the guide for family discussion surrounding chapter five, she encourages families to consider one or two practices that they would like to integrate into their family's life. She then asks them to consider which leader in the church might be best equipped to help them integrate that faith practice. These two encouragements will be integral to this project. The guide for congregations provides similar encouragement, which may be helpful in discovering the greatest perceived needs among

⁴⁹ Garland, *Sacred Stories of Ordinary Families*, 129-30.

⁵⁰ Garland, *Sacred Stories of Ordinary Families*, 132.

the parents at Medina FUMC who would like to become more confident in their roles as primary spiritual influences on their children.

Richard Foster, likely one of the most widely-recognized instructors in the spiritual disciplines, outlines twelve disciplines that open the disciple to the working of Christ in his or her life. He begins with the inward disciplines of meditation, prayer, fasting, and study; and then moves to the outward disciplines of simplicity, solitude, submission, and service. He ends his guide to the disciplines with the corporate disciplines: confession, worship, guidance, and celebration. In each chapter he introduces the discipline, outlines its place in Scripture, addresses some misgivings that practitioners might have, and then offers ways in which the practitioner might practice the discipline.

Foster's work extends beyond the Wesleyan means of grace that will be the primary focus of this project, but his is the seminal work on the practice of disciplines, and his teaching is invaluable.

"Practicing Families" is a website born in January 2013 as the dream of Joanna Harader, a Mennonite pastor, who longed for resources that would help parents, children, and families deepen their spiritual lives.⁵¹ Each Monday the website contributors offer a Family Liturgy; each Wednesday a contributor offers a reflection on the process and experience of practicing spiritual disciplines with children; and each Friday a contributor offers spiritual insight from parenting.⁵² Practicing Families' offerings are primarily liturgies, but many of those liturgies include prayers, questions for reflection, and an additional practice to complement the liturgy itself. For example, the liturgy offering for

⁵¹ "Welcome to Practicing Families," Practicing Families, posted on January 10, 2013, accessed December 12, 2014, <http://practicingfamilies.com/2013/01/10/welcome-to-practicing-families-2/>.

⁵² "About," Practicing Families, accessed December 12, 2014, <http://practicingfamilies.com/about-2/>.

November 10, 2014, was called “I thank my God . . .” It provided a prayer, a Scripture reading, a memory verse, a reflection on the Scripture, questions for conversation, and a spiritual practice. In this case the spiritual practice was a gratitude walk in which the family walks through the neighborhood; notes the wonderful things that they see, hear, feel, and smell; and breathes thanks to God for the goodness that they experience.⁵³

There are many aspects of Practicing Families that are of value to this project. The weekly rhythm might be conducive to family use. It does not feel rushed, and it gives families the option to schedule the liturgy in a way that works with their own schedules. A liturgy with multiple facets like the one noted above provides the opportunity to spread the pieces over several days so that families can focus on one or two pieces per day. For instance, a family might offer the prayer and Scripture reading on Monday, introduce the memory verse on Tuesday, review the Scripture and memory verse on Wednesday while adding in the reflection, ask the questions for reflection on Thursday, and focus on the spiritual practice on Saturday.

The one drawback to the website is that the phrase “Family Liturgy” might intimidate men and women who do not come from a liturgical background or who might be suspicious of the term “liturgy.”

Spiritual Disciplines and Families: A Wesleyan View

Much has been written about John Wesley and the means of grace, although not necessarily from the perspective of practicing those means of grace within the family

⁵³ “I thank my God . . .,” Practicing Families, posted on November 10, 2014, accessed December 12, 2014, <http://practicingfamilies.com/2014/11/10/1957/>.

unit. The clearest instruction from Wesley's own words is found in his sermon titled "On Family Religion" in which he instructs fathers that

you should take care that [family members] have some time every day for reading, meditation, and prayer; and you should inquire whether they do actually employ that time in the exercises for which it is allowed. Neither should any day pass without family prayer, seriously and solemnly performed.⁵⁴

In addition, Wesley did also write collections of prayers. For example, Volume VI of the Collected Works of John Wesley by John Emory includes "A Collection of Forms of Prayer for Every Day in the Week"⁵⁵ (1733), "A Collection of Prayers for Families"⁵⁶ that includes morning and evening prayers for each day of the week, and "Prayers for Children"⁵⁷ that also includes morning and evening prayers for each day of the week.

In his preface to the "Prayers for Children," Wesley says this to young disciples:

My dear child, A lover of your soul has here drawn up a few prayers, in order to assist you in that great duty. Be sure that you do not omit, at least morning and evening, to present yourself on your knees before God. You have mercies to pray for, and blessings to praise God for. But take care that you do not mock God, drawing near with your lips, while your heart is far from him. God sees you, and knows your thoughts; therefore, see that you not only speak with your lips, but pray with your heart. And that you may not ask in vain, see that you forsake sin, and make it your endeavor to do what God has shown you ought; because God says, "The prayers of the wicked are an abomination unto the Lord." Ask then of God the blessings you want, in the name, and for the sake, of Jesus Christ, and God will hear you and answer you, and do more for you than you can either ask or think. John Wesley

Wesley offers no other particular instructions to or for children regarding the means of grace. Given his context and milieu, we are safe to assume that the Lord's

⁵⁴ John Wesley, "On Family Religion," General Board of Global Ministries of the United Methodist Church; accessed April 17, 2015, <http://www.umcmission.org/Find-Resources/John-Wesley-Sermons/Sermon-94-On-Family-Religion>.

⁵⁵ John Emory, ed., *The Works of the Reverend John Wesley, A.M.* (New York: T. Mason and G. Lane, 1839), 377-401.

⁵⁶ Emory, *The Works of the Reverend John Wesley*, 401-17.

⁵⁷ Emory, *The Works of the Reverend John Wesley*, 417-26.

Supper would have been a given for Methodist families during Wesley's lifetime and that fasting would be expected when children were older.

Conclusion

Quality literature already exists for families who want to practice spiritual disciplines in the home, and for churches who desire to partner with parents as parents seek to be the primary spiritual influences on their children. The gap in literature is the absence of a particularly Methodist/Wesleyan way of approaching spiritual disciplines practiced in the family unit. Also missing from the current literature is instruction for church leaders in the United Methodist Church as they equip parents to be the primary spiritual influences on their children.

John Wesley clearly outlined for his followers the means of grace by which they would open themselves to God's work in their lives. A great gift to all Methodists would be a way to focus specifically on those means of grace as guides for practicing spiritual disciplines in the home.

CHAPTER FOUR

RESEARCH METHODS

Introduction

“Spiritual Disciplines, Church, and Home” was a project with four main elements: A preliminary survey, a class titled “Parenting on Point,” a pre-class survey, and a post-class survey.

Project Overview

The catalyst for this project was Kenda Creasy Dean’s assertion in *Almost Christian* that “the single most important influence on the religious and spiritual lives of adolescents is their parents. While other relatives, mentors, and youth ministers may be very influential, parents are most important in forming their children’s spirituality.”¹ The questions formulated in response to Dean’s assertion was this: Do we as United Methodist parents already have the tools at our disposal for being the most important influence on the religious and spiritual lives of our children? And if we do already have those tools at our disposal, how do we use them most effectively? Furthermore, what is the church’s role in equipping parents to be the most important influence on the religious and spiritual lives of their children?

The tools in question are what John Wesley called the “means of grace.” In his sermon of the same name, Wesley states that “by ‘means of grace’ I understand outward signs, words, or actions ordained of God and appointed for this end—to be the *ordinary*

¹ Kenda Creasy Dean, *Almost Christian: What the Faith of Our Teenagers Is Telling the American Church* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 203.

channels whereby he might convey to men preventing, justifying, and sanctifying grace.”² He goes on say that “the chief of these means are prayer . . . searching the Scriptures . . . and receiving the Lord’s Supper . . . and these we believe to be ordained of God as the ordinary channels of conveying his grace to the souls of men.”³

The question that this project seeks to answer is: Can knowledge and practice of the means of grace equip parents to be the most important influence on the religious and spiritual lives of their children?

Part One: Parenting on Point Preliminary Survey

The first step of the project was to determine if there was actually a need for parents to be equipped by the church to be the most important influence on the religious and spiritual lives of their children.

An online survey (Appendix A) was distributed to United Methodist parents who attend four surrounding United Methodist churches and the church that I currently serve as pastor (Appendix B). These are the four largest United Methodist churches in Medina and the surrounding areas. They are

- Medina First United Methodist Church (Medina, TN)
- Milan First United Methodist Church (Milan, TN)
- Grace United Methodist Church (Jackson, TN)
- Northside United Methodist Church (Jackson, TN)
- First United Methodist Church (Jackson, TN)

² Albert C. Outler and Richard P. Heitzenrater, eds., *John Wesley’s Sermons: An Anthology* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1991), 160.

³ Outler and Heitzenrater, *John Wesley’s Sermons*, 160.

As the following chapter will show, the preliminary survey, completed by 85 people, indicated a need for parents to be equipped by the church to be the most important influence on the religious and spiritual lives of their children.

Part Two: Parenting on Point Class

The next step was to plan a 2.5-hour class for parents who were interested in learning more about how to be the most important influence on the religious and spiritual lives of their children. Parents from the same five churches that received the initial survey (the four surrounding churches and the church that I serve) were invited to participate in the class. The class was free, childcare was provided for free, and the class was held at Northside United Methodist Church (Appendix A) as it was central to the five churches from which parents were invited.

Surveys

Upon their arrival at the class, participants were given a survey packet. This packet consisted of three items. A pre-class survey was attached to the front of a manila envelope that contained a corresponding post-class survey. The pre-class and post-class surveys were coded with four-digit numbers to ensure correspondence between the two. When the participants received their survey packets, Research Assistant 1 recorded the four-digit number of the packet that they were receiving in case packets became mixed up at tables. Each participant was asked to fill out the pre-class survey, turn it in

immediately to Research Assistant 1, and keep the envelope with the post-class survey closed until the class had concluded and they were instructed to open it.

Each participant was also given an IRB Informed Consent form to sign and return immediately to Research Assistant 1.

The pre-class survey (Appendix C) asked participants to assess the following:

- Their knowledge of how to influence the religious and spiritual lives of their children
- Their confidence in their ability to be the single most important spiritual influence on the religious and spiritual lives of their children
- How positive they felt about having the role of primary spiritual influence on their children
- How well their churches had equipped them to be the single most important influence on the spiritual and religious lives of the children

Other clarifying questions included the marital status of the parents, the ages and genders of children, the length of time that the parents had been members of their current United Methodist church, the length of time that the parents had been members of any United Methodist church, and some narrative questions to help interpret the data.

At the conclusion of the class, participants were asked to open their envelopes and complete the post-class survey. None of the packets had been mixed up at the tables, so Research Assistant 1 shredded the records of the codes. Participants were given fifteen minutes to complete the survey and turn it in to Research Assistant 1.

The post-class survey (Appendix D) asked participants to assess

- The effectiveness of the course in increasing their knowledge about how to influence the religious and spiritual lives of their children
- The effectiveness of the course in increasing their confidence in their ability to be the single most important influence on the religious and spiritual lives of their children
- The effectiveness of the course in helping them feel more positive about their role as the primary spiritual influence on their children
- How well the course equipped them to be the primary spiritual influence on the religious and spiritual lives of their children

It also asked participants how likely they would be to recommend this course to other parents in their congregations if it was offered.

Once pre-class and post-class surveys were collected, Research Assistant 2 matched and coded all of the surveys in Excel.

The Participants

Participants were invited to the class by two methods. The first was a Facebook event. Every parent I knew from each of the five churches was invited to the class via Facebook with the event made shareable so that my Facebook friends could also invite their Facebook friends. A flyer (Appendix E) was also created and sent to the other four participating churches so that they could distribute it in whatever ways were most appropriate for their contexts.

Interested participants were asked to sign up for the class online using the Eventbrite website. In the hours before the event started, 33 individuals had signed up for

the class online, and two asked me that morning at church if they could attend, making a total of 35 anticipated participants. When the class began there were 26 individuals present. They were seated at four rectangular tables. Two tables were populated by seven people and two tables were populated six people. Participants were not assigned seats.

The age range of the children represented by the parents present was two months to ten years. All of the participants with the exception of one identified themselves as married. The other individual self-identified as separated.

All of the participants came with spouses with the exception of three. All participants who attended with spouses chose to sit together during the class.

Three of the five churches from which parents were invited were represented at the class. There were no participants from either Milan First United Methodist Church or Grace United Methodist Church.

The class was divided into three major sections focused on three primary means of grace: worship, prayer, and searching the Scripture. Each section included a short presentation (Appendices F and G) and at least one interactive table activity for the participants to engage in.

Participants were given short breaks after each major section and provided with healthy snacks and water.

Multiple Attempts

The Class

The class was initially designed solely for parents who were members of Medina First United Methodist Church and who had children in grades kindergarten through 5.

The original class was offered on four consecutive Wednesday nights for one hour with free childcare provided. Each eligible couple (if parents were married) or parent (if not married) was sent a packet in the mail that contained a registration form for the class, an IRB Informed Consent Form, and a cover letter explaining the purpose of the class and the requirements of participants. The packet also contained a self-addressed stamped envelope that participants could use to return the completed forms.

On the day that the classes were scheduled to begin twelve participants had returned registration forms and IRB Informed Consent forms. That same day four of them stated that they would not be able to attend the class. At that point I chose to cancel the class and seek another way to obtain a larger sample size.

After consultation with Dr. Brian Auday of Gordon College, it was clear the pool of potential participants needed to be extended, and that the class needed to be structured so that it could be completed in one day. I then consulted two children's ministers from churches in the area and asked for their feedback. Together we drew the following conclusions:

- The class should be held on a Sunday afternoon between the first day of the school year (August 1) and the first Sunday of the NFL season (September 10).
The date chosen was August 30 from 3:00-5:30 pm.
- The class should be held at the church most central to the five from which parents were going to be invited. This was Northside United Methodist Church, located immediately off of Interstate 40 in Jackson.
- The class should include free childcare.

- The class should be given a name different from the name of the project. Thus the class was titled “Parenting on Point” rather than “Spiritual Disciplines, Church, and Home.”

The Curriculum

A written curriculum seemed to be appropriate when the course was to be structured as four one-hour sessions, so the original curriculum was separated into four parts and titled “Spiritual Disciplines, Church, and Home.” Each participant would receive a copy of the curriculum which would guide learning and conversations (Appendix H).

When the class was changed to become a 2.5-hour long seminar, the information needed to be adapted so that it was appropriate for the context of a seminar. Inge Poole, PhD, an educational consultant, assisted in turning the original curriculum into a class that included both lecture and interactive table activities for participants. She also recommended eliminating one of the means of grace from the original curriculum due to time constraints, so the section on fasting was eliminated.

Conclusions

Although planning the project initially required a substantial amount of trial and error, the final product was a high-energy class filled with learning, connection, and fellowship.

CHAPTER FIVE

DATA ANALYSIS

Introduction

“Spiritual Disciplines, Church, and Home” addresses three primary concerns:

1. The need for United Methodists to be equipped by the church to be the single most important influence on the spiritual and religious lives of their children.
2. How knowledgeable, confident, positive, and well-equipped men and women preparing to take a “Parenting on Point” class felt in their roles as the most important influence on the spiritual and religious lives of their children.
3. How effectively the “Parenting on Point” class addressed participants’ confidence, knowledge, positive feelings, and sense of being equipped to be the most important influence on the spiritual and religious lives of their children.

Parenting on Point: The Preliminary Survey

The first question to be addressed by this research was the question of the need for United Methodists to be equipped by the church to be the most important influence on the religious and spiritual lives of their children. This question was posed in a preliminary online survey using SurveyMonkey (Appendix A). United Methodists from five area United Methodist churches were invited to participate in the survey (Appendix B). Ninety-five individuals began the survey. Anyone who answered that they were not currently a member of a United Methodist church in Question 3 was thanked for their

participation and disqualified from the remainder of the survey, leaving 85 individuals who completed the survey.

The data from the research are visible in the following two bar graphs. The first graph shows how people answered the question, “On a scale of 1 to 5, how well has your church equipped you to be the single most important influence on the religious and spiritual lives of your children?” The resulting bar graph (Figure 1) shows the following:

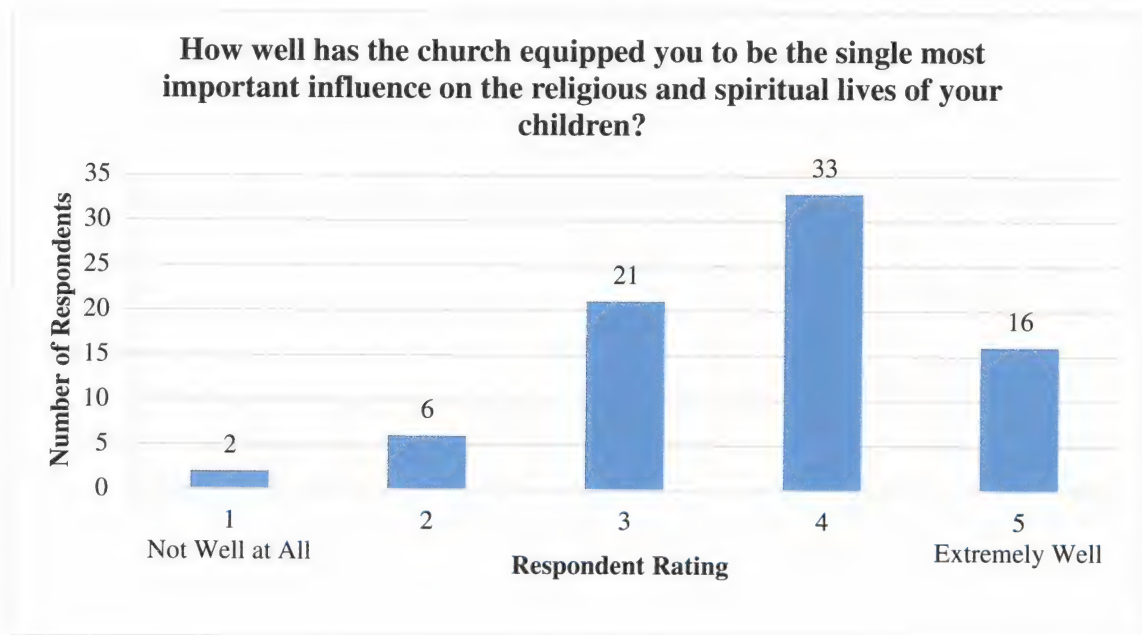


Figure 1. Preliminary survey: How well has the church equipped you to be the single most important influence on the religious and spiritual lives of your children?

The second graph shows how people answered the question, “On a scale of 1 to 5, how well do you feel equipped to be the single most important influence on the religious and spiritual lives of your children, whether or not your church has been intentional in giving you the tools to be that influence?” The resulting bar graph (Figure 2) shows the following:

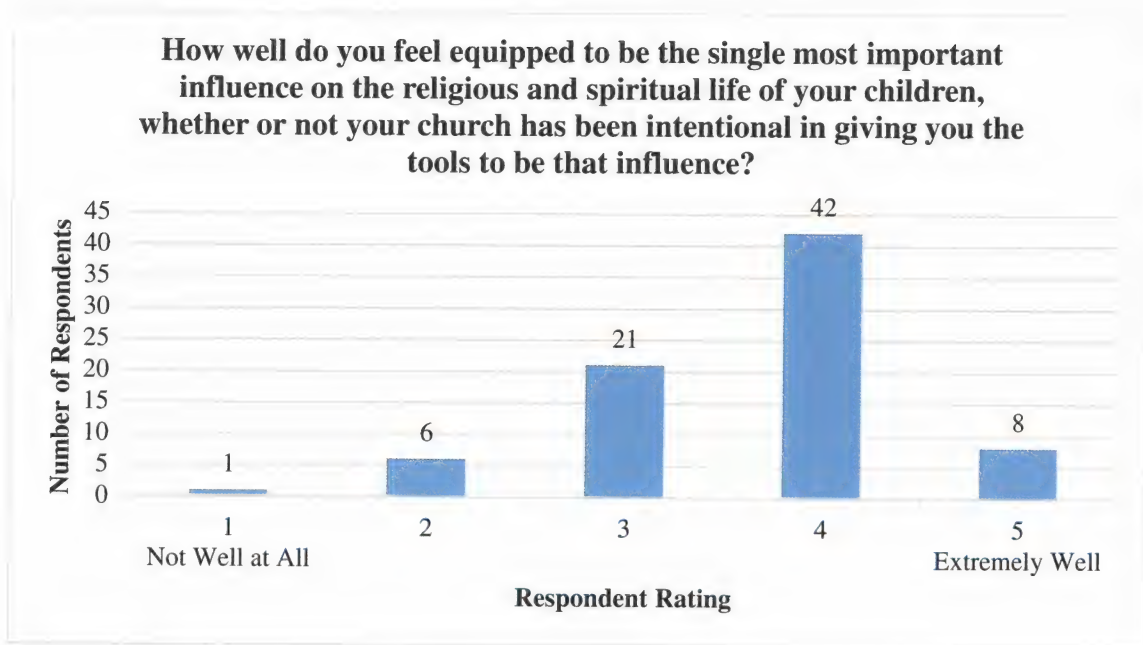


Figure 2. Preliminary survey: How well do you feel equipped to be the single most important influence on the religious and spiritual lives of your children?

If we place these results on the same bar graph, we get the following results (Figure 3).

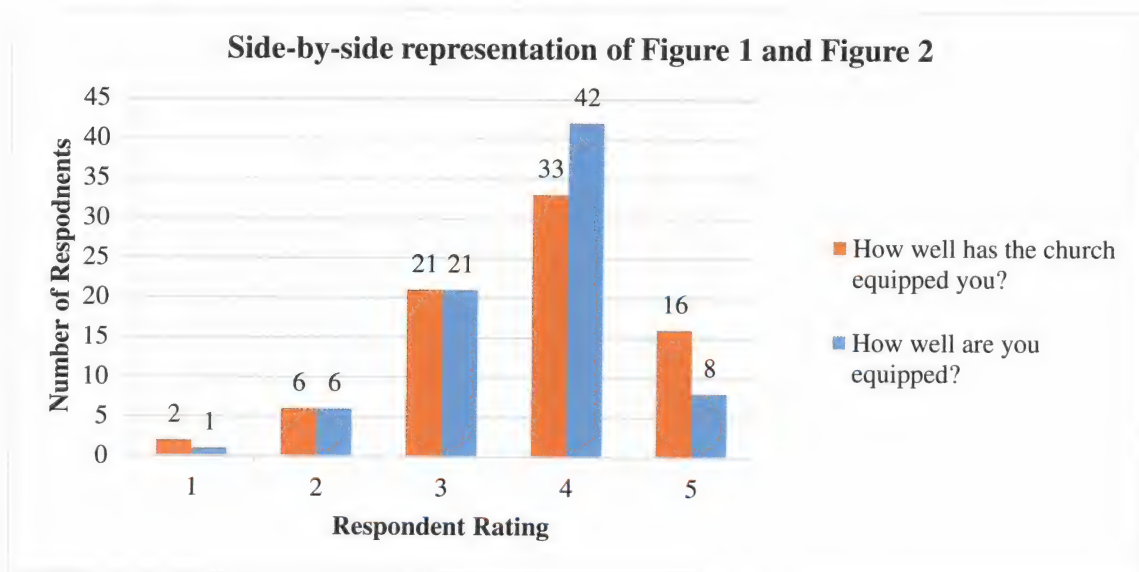


Figure 3. Preliminary survey: Side-by-side results of Figure 1 and Figure 2.

The numbers above the bars in the three above graphs show the frequency of the responses. The mode of both of these bar graphs is 4, telling us that the majority of participants believe that they fall between being moderately well-equipped and extremely well-equipped to be the single most important influence on the religious and spiritual lives of their children, whether that equipment has come from the church or from other sources.

Using simple percentages, we find that 37% of respondents report that their church has equipped them anywhere from “Not well at all” to “Moderately well” (Figure 4) and that 36% of respondents feel “Not well at all” to “Moderately well” equipped to be the single most important influence on the religious or spiritual lives of their children, whether or not the church has been intentional in giving them appropriate tools to be that influence (Figure 5).

How well has the church equipped you to be the single most important influence on the religious and spiritual lives of your children?

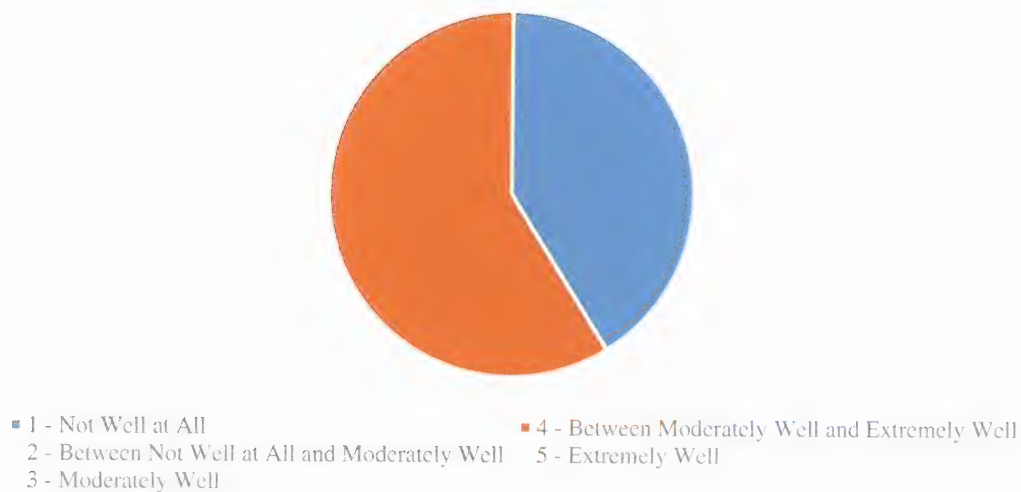


Figure 4. Preliminary survey: How well has the church equipped you to be the single most important influence on the religious and spiritual lives of your children? (percentage)

How well do you feel equipped to be the single most important influence on the religious and spiritual life of your children, whether or not your church has been intentional in giving you the tools to be that influence?

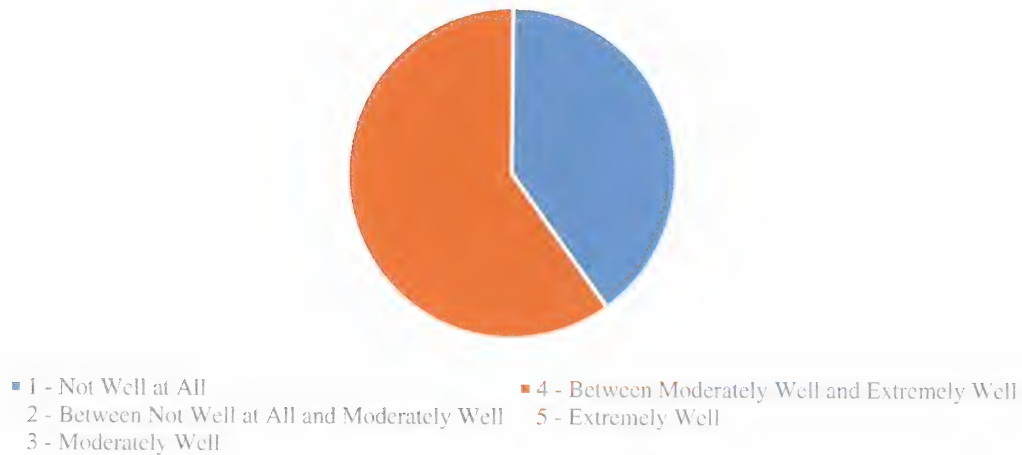


Figure 5. Preliminary survey: How well do you feel equipped to be the single most important influence on the religious and spiritual life of your children? (percentage)

The National Study of Youth and Religion conducted by Christian Smith and Melinda Lundquist Denton, the results of which are reported in *Soul Searching: The Religious and Spiritual Lives of American Teenagers*, focused on adolescents age thirteen to seventeen. When parents of these adolescents in mainline Protestant congregations were asked about the supportiveness and helpfulness of the church for parents trying to raise teenagers, the results were different from the results reported above. In the case of the National Study of Youth and Religion, 57% of parents reported that the church was “Not supportive and helpful,” “A little supportive and helpful,” or “Somewhat supportive and helpful.”¹

¹ Christian Smith and Melinda Lundquist Denton, *Soul Searching: The Religious and Spiritual Lives of American Teenagers* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 64.

There are three possible causes of this difference. The first is that the Parenting on Point preliminary survey did not provide an objective definition of what it means for a parent to be “the single most important influence on the religious and spiritual lives of children,” to the extent that those completing the survey had the opportunity to define it in whatever way they chose. In particular, parents were free to define their role as the single most important influence on the religious and spiritual lives of their children by how well-equipped they *felt* rather than whether or not they actually engaged in any spiritual *practice* within the family unit. This difference between perceived ability to be the most important influence on the religious and spiritual lives of their children and actually living out that influence in spiritual practices is an important one. In their “Concluding Unscientific Postscript,” Smith and Denton report that “regular *religious practices* in the lives of youth beyond those in and of collective weekly congregations seem to be extremely important.”² They elaborate by stating that

very basic practices such as regular scripture reading, prayer, and intentional works of service and mercy mark and structure the lives of teens committed to faith, and do not for teens not committed to faith . . . They should also be taught to practice their faith in the sense of consistently working on skills, habits, and virtues in the direction of excellence in faith . . . Many religious teens in the United States appear to engage in few religious practices . . . We suspect that youth educators and ministers will not get far with youth, in other words, unless regular and intentional religious practices become an important part of their larger faith formation.³

While teenagers may report that they are religious, this research indicates those who are genuinely committed to their religious faith also practice spiritual disciplines. We can conclude that there is certainly a component of *feeling* religious that may *not* also include religious practices.

² Smith and Denton, *Soul Searching*, 269.

³ Smith and Denton, *Soul Searching*, 269-70.

The results of the Parenting on Point pre-class survey bear this out. Participants were asked, “What are some concrete actions you have taken to influence the religious and spiritual lives of your children?” All 26 participants answered the question, but only 65% listed actions *other than* taking the child to church or other religious programming. These concrete actions include but are not limited to reading the Bible, Bible stories, or devotional books every day; Scripture memorization; praying together daily; teaching children prayers; Bible studies in conjunction with the liturgical calendar, such as during Advent and Lent; and considering daily decisions based on the family’s understanding of Christian discipleship. The other 35% of the participants in the class did not do anything concrete to influence the religious and spiritual lives of their children outside of taking them to church and church-sponsored activities.

The second possibility is that those who took the Parenting on Point preliminary survey already had a positive attitude toward, and experiences of, the role of the church in helping them become the single most important influence on the religious and spiritual lives of their children.

The third possibility is that the church is less effective in helping parents become the single most important influence on the religious and spiritual lives of teenagers than it is in helping parents become the single most important influence on the religious and spiritual lives of children.

While all three possibilities likely contribute to the discrepancy between the Parenting on Point preliminary survey and the National Study of Youth and Religion results, the primary contributor to the discrepancy is likely the first possibility above. Despite the primarily positive responses shown in Figures 1-5, when asked “What is one

thing your church could do to more adequately equip you to be the single most important influence on the religious and spiritual lives of your children?” 79% of respondents provided a specific example of at least one thing that the church could do to equip them more adequately in this area. Eight percent of respondents skipped the question altogether, and 13% stated that their churches already did an adequate job and did not need to offer any additional support to parents.

Parental self-report in the Parenting on Point preliminary survey is good news for the church, but, as expected, leaves ample room for the church to be more proactive in its role in equipping parents to be the single most important influence on the religious and spiritual lives of their children.

Parenting on Point Class: Pre-Class Survey

The second set of data shows how participants in the “Parenting on Point” class rated themselves in the following areas prior to the class:

- Their knowledge of how to influence the religious and spiritual lives of their children
- Their confidence in their ability to be the single most important spiritual influence on the religious and spiritual lives of their children
- How positive they felt about having the role of primary spiritual influence on their children
- How well their churches had equipped them to be the single most important influence on the spiritual and religious lives of their children

Simple bar graphs, followed by tables of percentages, show the following (Figures 6-9):

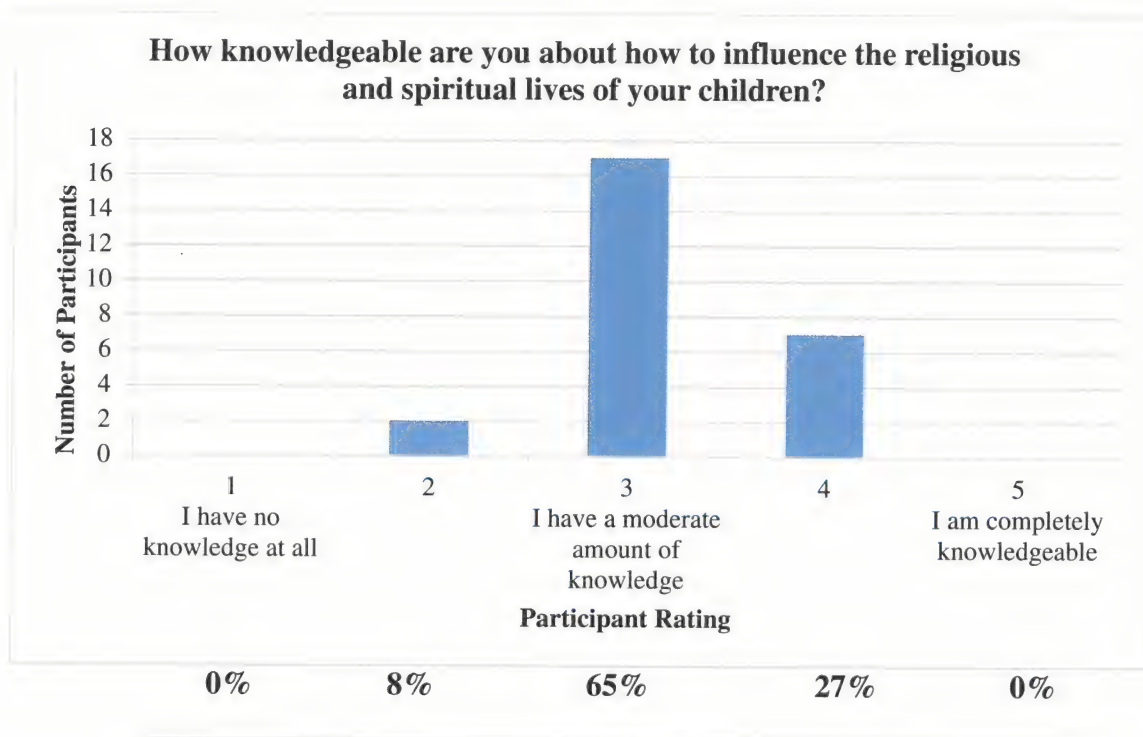


Figure 6. Pre-class survey: How knowledgeable are you about how to influence the religious and spiritual lives of your children?

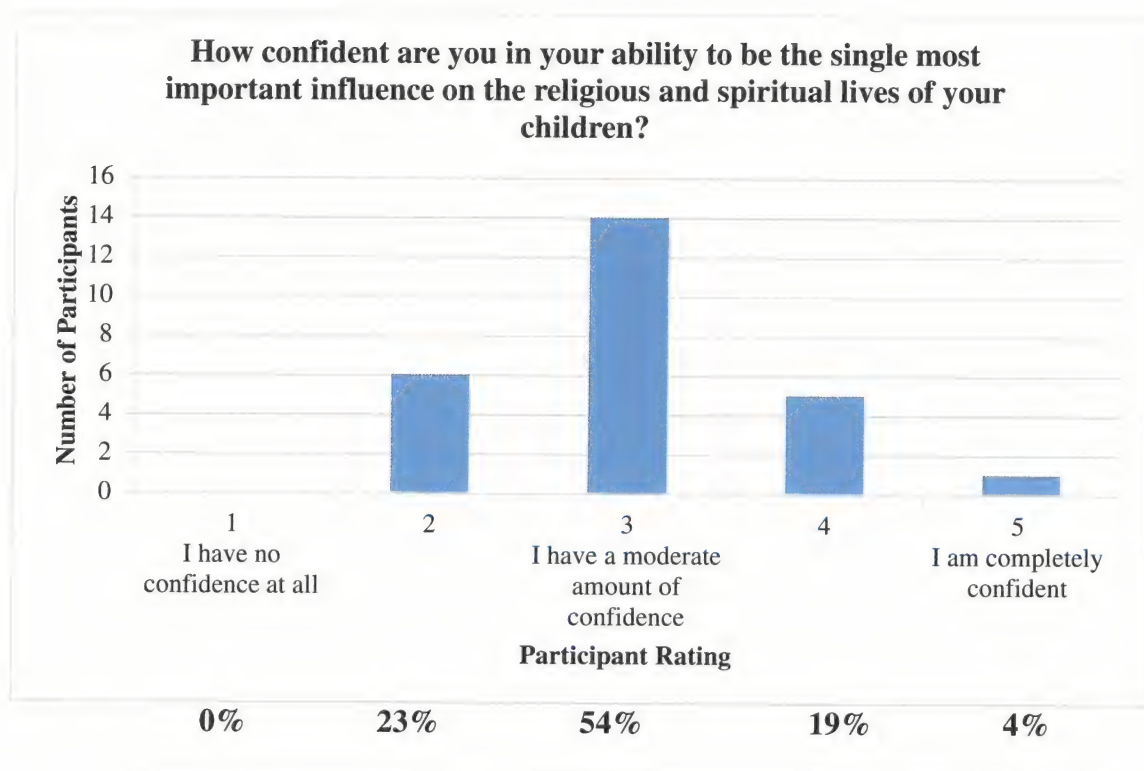


Figure 7. Pre-class survey: How confident are you in your ability to be the single most important influence on the religious and spiritual lives of your children?

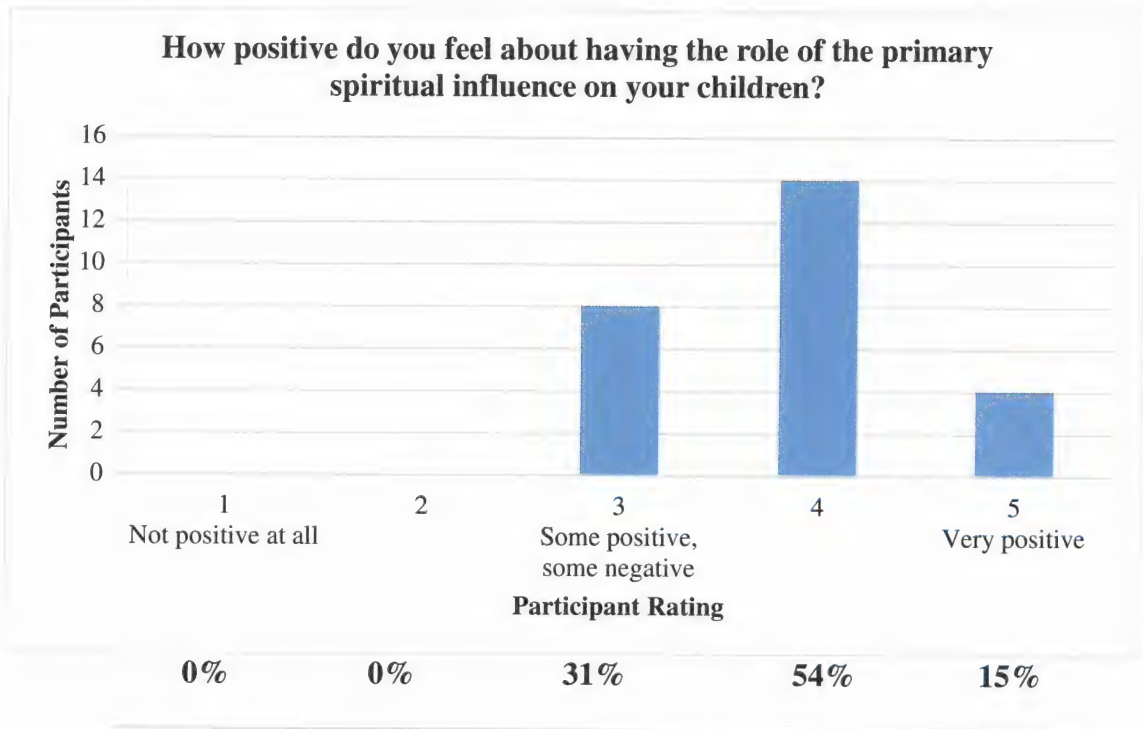


Figure 8. Pre-class survey: How positive do you feel about having the role of the primary spiritual influence on your children?

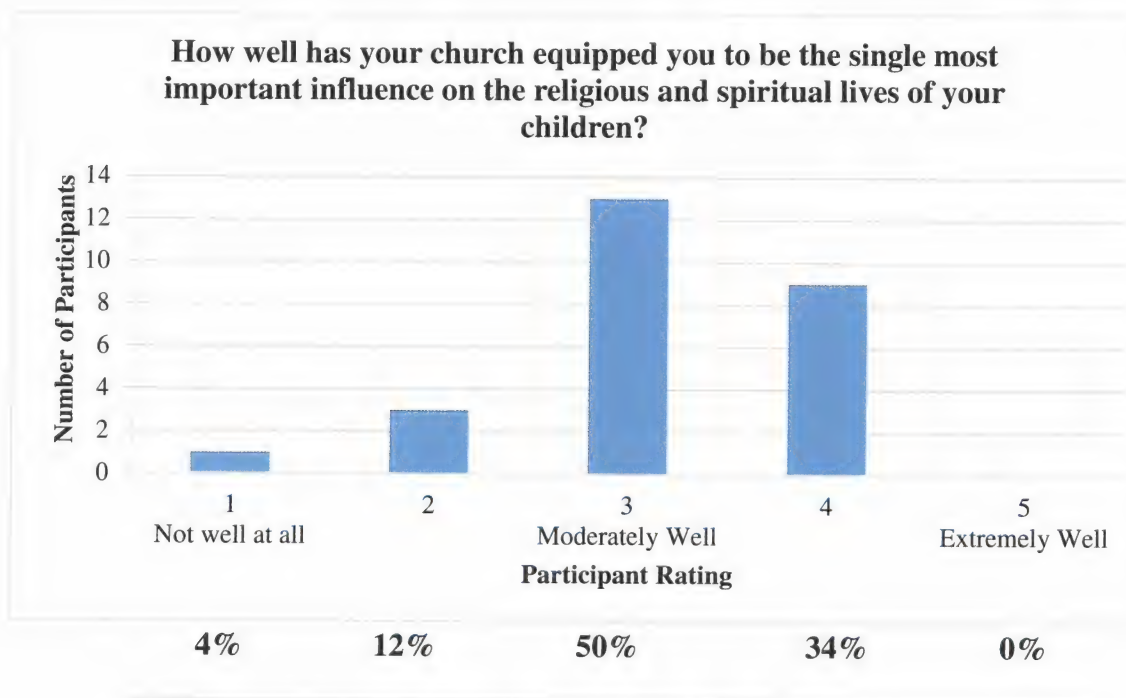


Figure 9. Pre-class survey: How well has your church equipped you to be the single most important influence on the religious and spiritual lives of your children?

The mode for the measures of Knowledge, Confidence, and Equipment is 3, while the mode for the measure of Positivity is 4. While parents report feeling positive about their roles as the most important influence on the spiritual lives of their children, their reported confidence level, knowledge base, and equipment do not match those positive feelings. These reports of positive feelings are certainly to be celebrated.

Parenting on Point Class: Post-Class Survey

The third set of data shows how participants in the “Parenting on Point” rated the following:

- The effectiveness of the course in increasing their knowledge about how to influence the religious and spiritual lives of their children
- The effectiveness of the course in increasing their confidence in their ability to be the single most important influence on the religious and spiritual lives of their children
- The effectiveness of the course in helping them feel more positive about their role as the primary spiritual influence on their children
- How well the course equipped them to be the primary spiritual influence on the religious and spiritual lives of their children

Simple bar graphs, followed by tables of percentages, show the following (Figures 10-13):

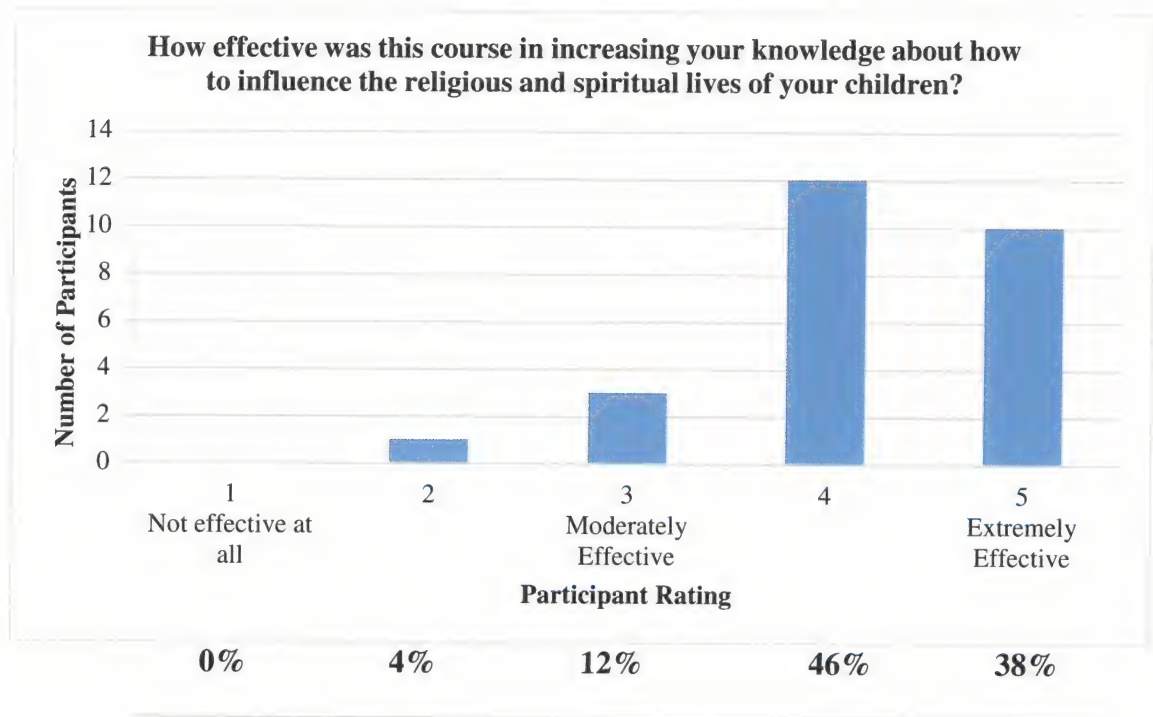


Figure 10. Post-class survey: How effective was this course in increasing your knowledge about how to influence the religious and spiritual lives of your children?



Figure 11. Post-class survey: How effective was this course in increasing your confidence in your ability to be the single most important influence on the religious and spiritual lives of your children?

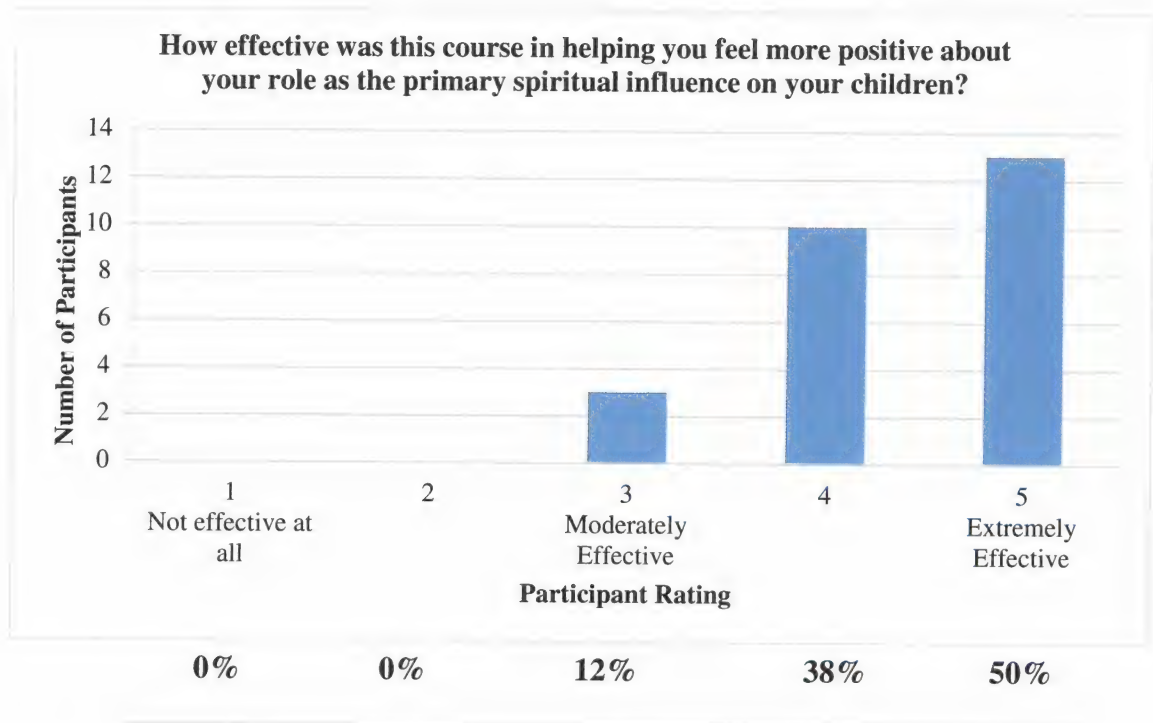


Figure 12. Post-class survey: How effective was this course in helping you feel more positive about your role as the primary spiritual influence on your children?

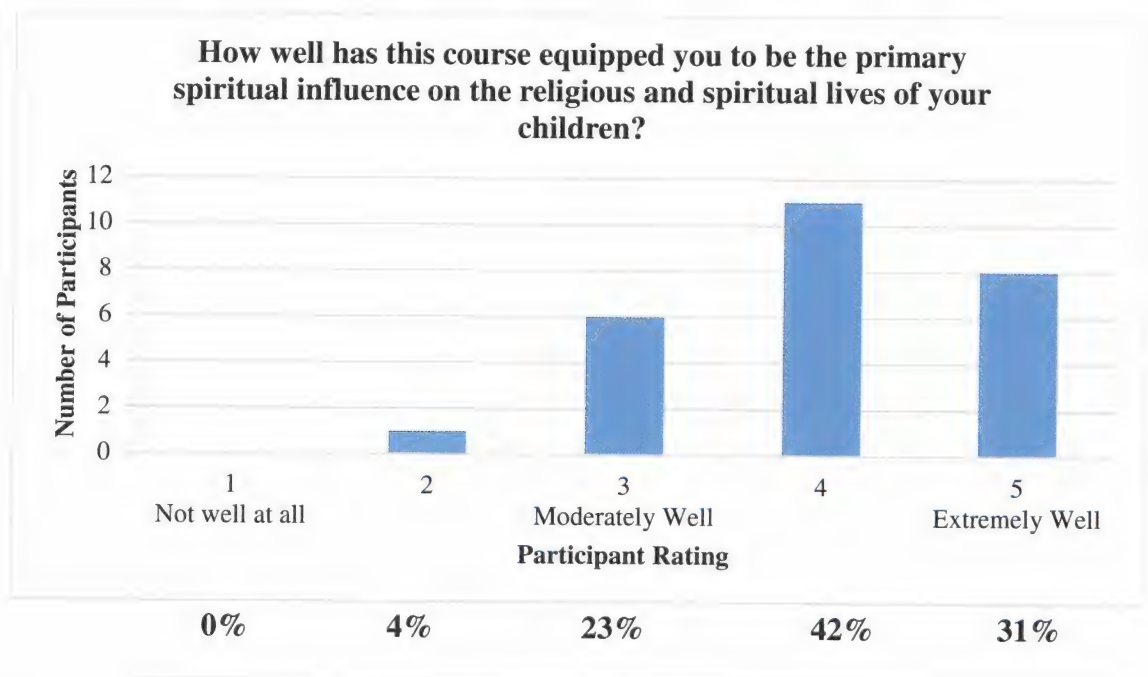


Figure 13. Post-class survey: How well has this course equipped you to be the primary spiritual influence on the religious and spiritual lives of your children?

The mode of the measures of effectiveness in increasing Knowledge, Confidence, and Equipment is 4, with the second-most-frequent score for these measures being 5. The mode for the measure of Positivity is 5, with the second-most-frequent score being 4. This data as a whole indicate that the course had a significant effect on the four measures included in the survey.

Parenting on Point: Assessing the Benefits

The survey was not designed to provide a direct before-and-after assessment of each participant's knowledge, confidence, positivity, and equipment. Instead, we assessed the effectiveness of the course by grouping participants according to their pre-class survey ratings in each of the four measures. We wanted to see, for example, the effectiveness of the course in increasing a participant's Confidence if they rated themselves Moderately Confident in the pre-class survey.

We were particularly interested two groups for each of the four measures. The first group is the group that rated themselves <3 in the four measures highlighted in the pre-class survey. Our interest in that group is based on the assumption that they will need more support for being the single most important influence on the religious and spiritual lives of their children than their classmates who rated themselves ≥ 3 in these measures. The <3 group represents the following percentages of respondents for their respective measures: 8% in Knowledge, 23% in Confidence, 0% in Positivity, and 15% in Equipment.

The second group is the group whose pre-class surveys represent the mode. For Knowledge, Confidence, and Equipment, the mode was 3. For Positivity, the mode was

4. The mode group for each measure represents the following percentage of respondents for their respective measures: 65% in Knowledge, 54% in Confidence, 54% in Positivity, and 50% in Equipment.

Findings from the <3 Group

Each participant who rated themselves <3 in Knowledge, Confidence, and Equipment (there were no <3 ratings in Positivity) rated the effectiveness of the class as either 3, 4, or 5.

In the category of Knowledge, two participants rated themselves <3 in the pre-class survey. When they rated the effectiveness of the course, one reported that it was between Moderately Effective and Extremely Effective (4), and one reported that it was Extremely Effective (5).

In the category of Confidence, six participants rated themselves <3 in the pre-class survey. When they rated the effectiveness of the course, one reported that it was Moderately Effective (3), four reported that it was between Moderately Effective and Extremely Effective (4), and one rated it Extremely Effective (5).

In the category of Equipment, four participants rated themselves <3 in the pre-class survey. When they rated the effectiveness of the course, two reported that it was Moderately Effective (3), one reported that it was between Moderately Effective and Extremely Effective (4), and one reported that it was Extremely Effective (5).

These data show that the course was at least Moderately Effective (3) for 100% of the participants who rated themselves <3 in measures of Knowledge, Confidence, and Equipment, the course was at least moderately effective.

Findings from the Modes

When we look at the group whose pre-class survey responses represent the mode in each measure, we see that all of these participants (with the exception of one outlier) rated the class as being Moderately Effective to Extremely Effective. The outlier is not, and never has been, a member of a United Methodist church. This participant heard about the course via word of mouth and was invited to attend by the researcher.

In the measure of Knowledge, 53% of the participants who rated themselves as 3 in the pre-class survey rated the class between Moderately Effective and Extremely Effective (mode=4) in increasing their knowledge. In the measure of Confidence, 77% of the participants who rated themselves as 3 in the pre-class survey rated the class between Moderately Effective and Extremely Effective (mode=4) in increasing their confidence. In the measure of Equipment, 46% of the group that rated themselves as 3 in the pre-class survey rated the effectiveness of the class between Moderately Well and Extremely Well (mode=4) in equipping them.

The only pre-class measure in which the mode was not 3 was the measure of Positivity (mode=4). Fifty percent of the group that rated themselves a 4 in the pre-class survey said in the post-class survey that the course was Extremely Effective (mode=5) in helping them feel more positive about their role as the most important influence on the religious and spiritual lives of their children.

With the exception of the outlier mentioned previously, every participant rated the effectiveness of the course between Moderately Effective/Well and Extremely Effective/Well in each measure.

Parenting on Point: Church Membership

The final question to be answered by the data is whether the length of time that one has been a member of a United Methodist church has any bearing on how participants rated themselves in each measure prior to the class, or how they rated the effectiveness of the course in each measure.

The bar graphs below (Figures 14-21) show the participants' self-ratings in each measure, and the participants' ratings of the effectiveness of the course in each measure. Participants who have been members of any United Methodist church for longer than ten years are represented by the red bars. Participants who have been members of any United Methodist church for ten years or less are represented by the blue bars.

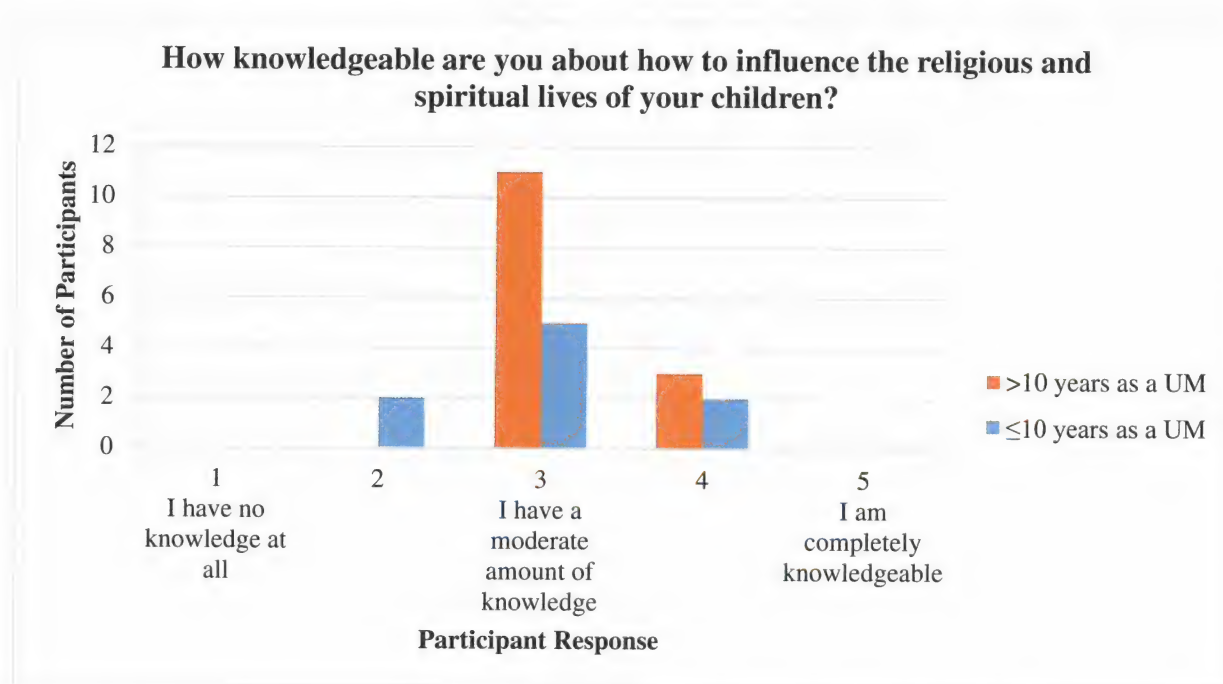


Figure 14. Length of church membership: Impact on knowledge in the pre-class survey

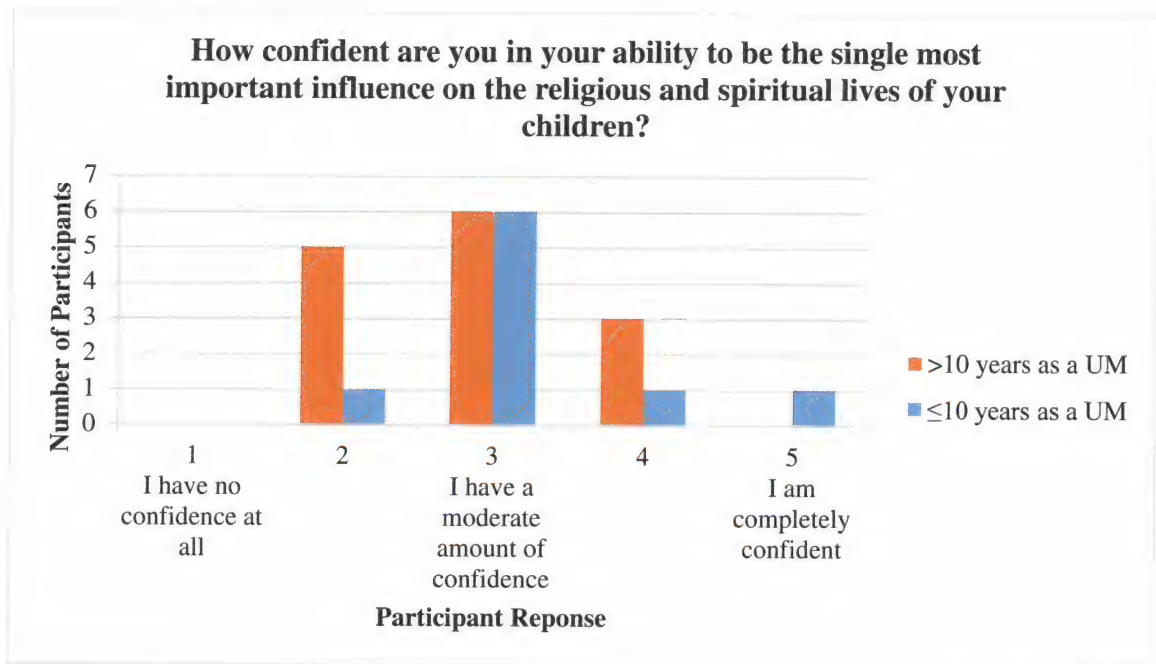


Figure 15. Length of church membership: Impact on confidence in the pre-class survey

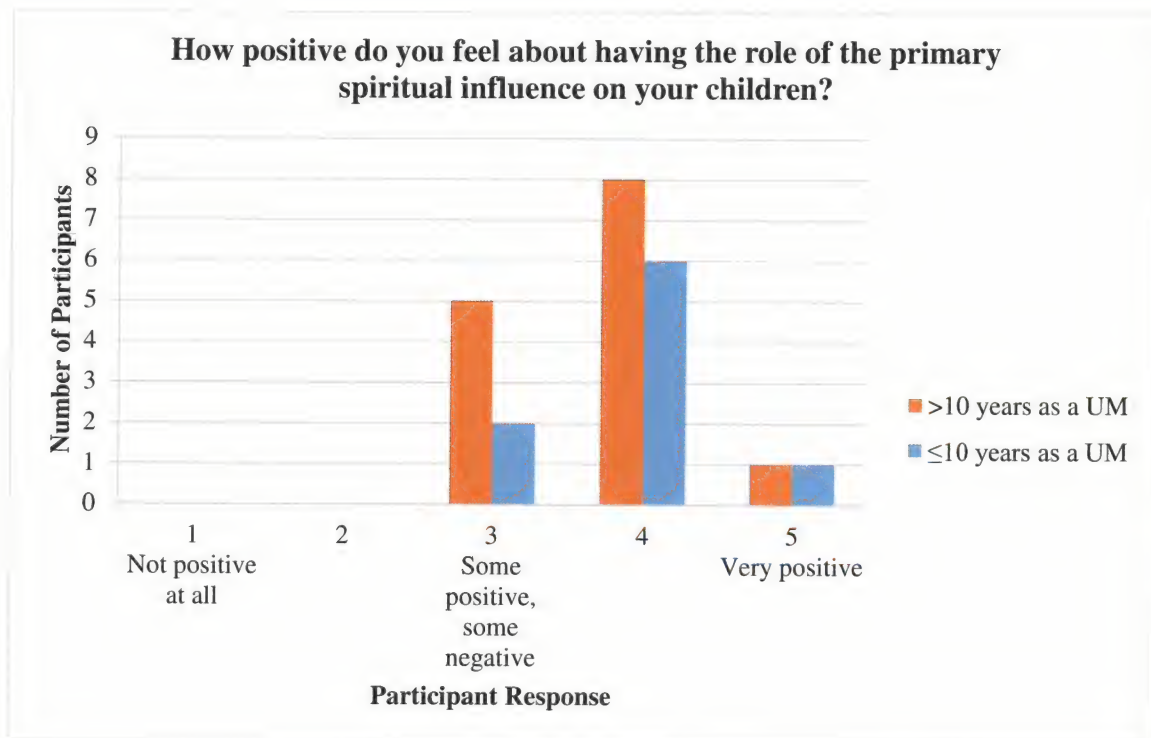


Figure 16. Length of church membership: Impact on positive feelings in the pre-class survey

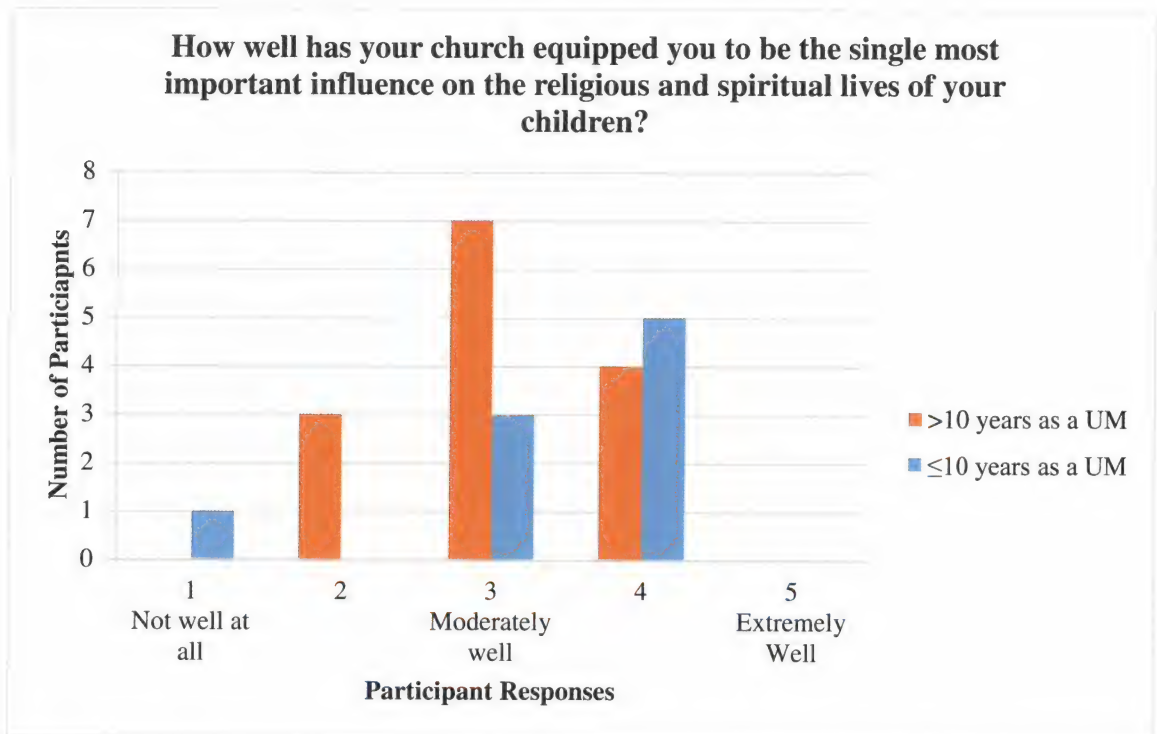


Figure 17. Length of church membership: Impact on how well you have been equipped in the pre-class survey

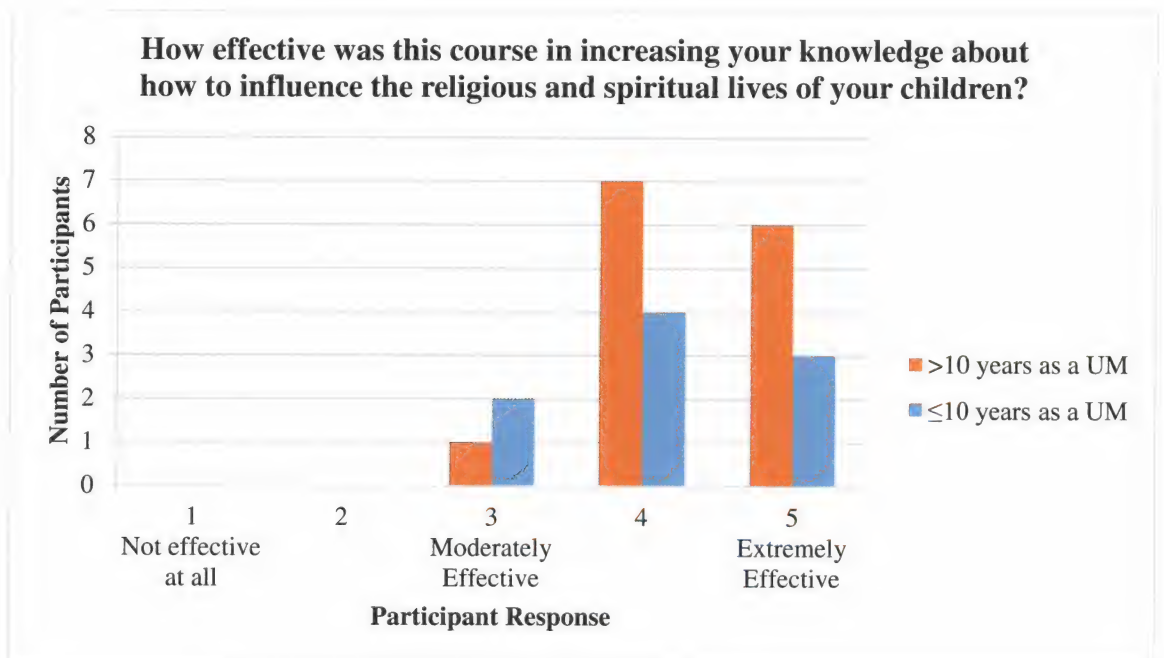


Figure 18. Length of church membership: How effective was the course in increasing your knowledge?



Figure 19. Length of church membership: How effective was this course in increasing your confidence?

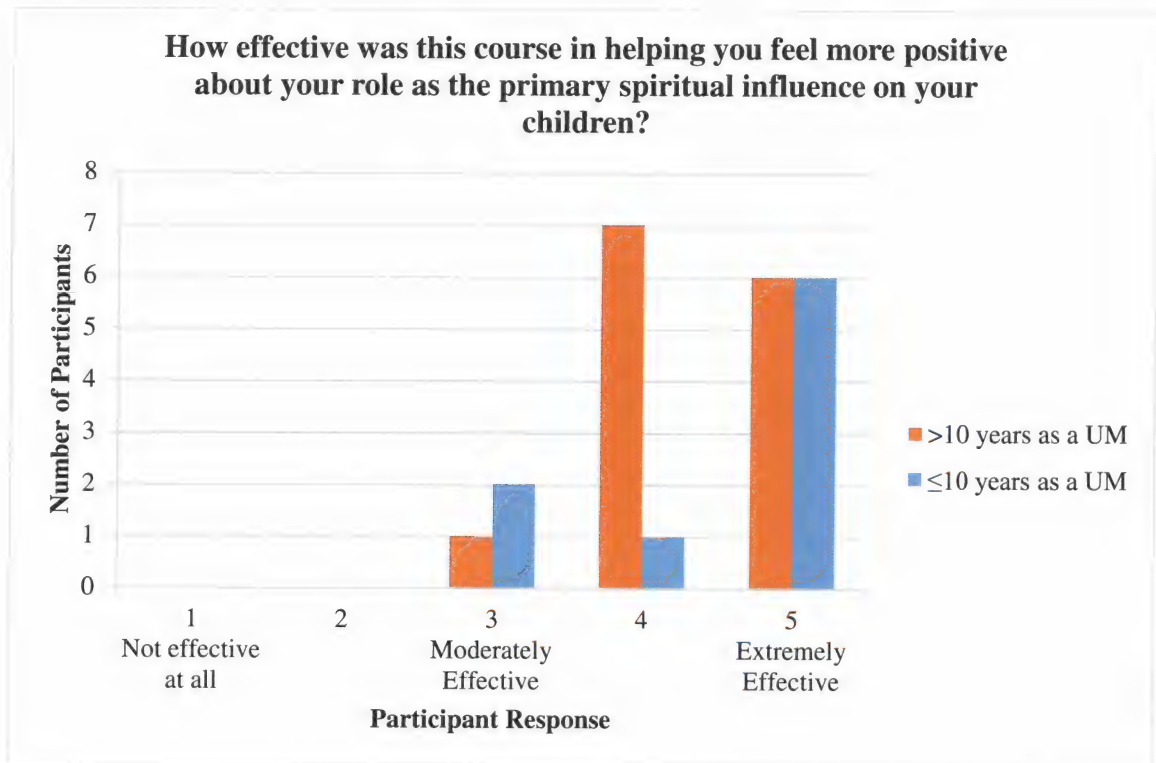


Figure 20. Length of church membership: How effective was this course in increasing positive feelings?

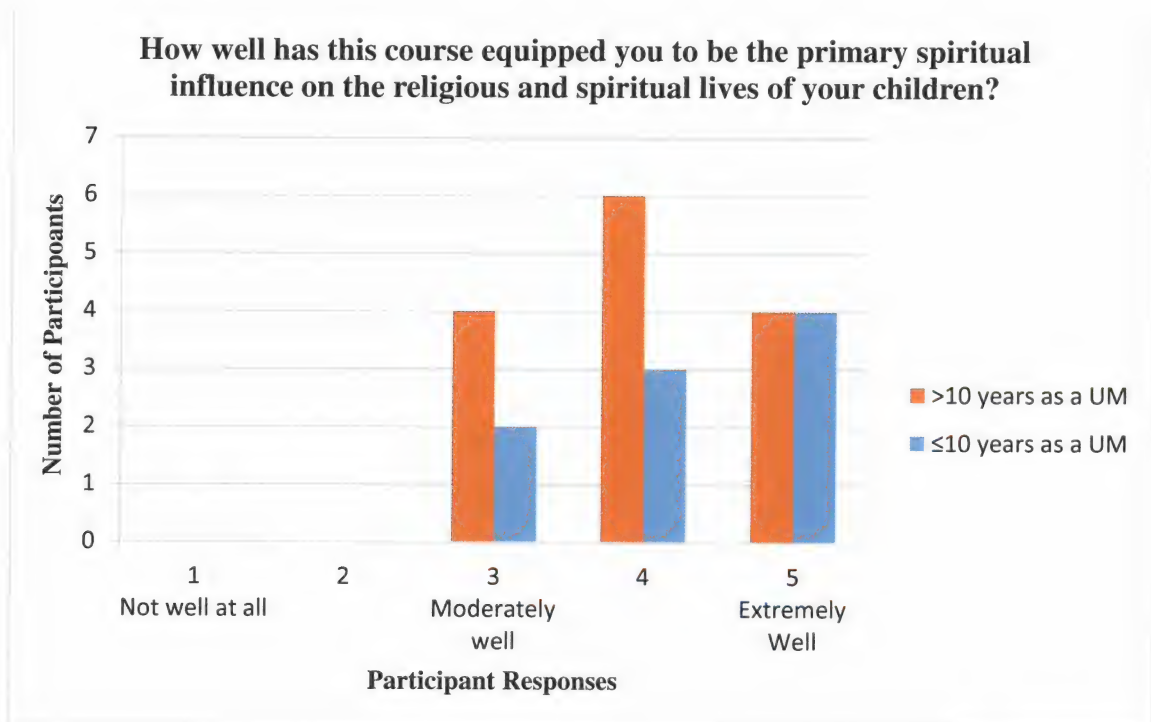


Figure 21. Length of church membership: How well has this course equipped you?

Three observations are worth noting. The first is found in the measure of Confidence in the pre-class survey. Participants who had been United Methodist for ten years or less had a mode of 3 in the Confidence measure in the pre-class survey, while participants who had been United Methodist for over ten years had a mode of 2. Thus, participants who have been United Methodist for ten years or less were more likely to report feeling confident in their roles as the most important influence on the religious and spiritual lives of their children than participants who had been United Methodist for more than ten years.

The second interesting observation is in the measure of Positivity. Participants who had been United Methodist for ten years or less had a mode of 5 in rating course effectiveness regarding Positivity, while participants who had been United Methodist for more than ten years had a mode of 4. Participants who had been United Methodist for ten years or less were more likely to report that the course was effective in helping them feel more positive about their roles as the most important influence on the religious and spiritual lives of their children than those who had been United Methodist for more than ten years.

Finally, participants who been United Methodist for ten years or less had a mode of 5 in rating the effectiveness of the course in equipping them, while participants who had been United Methodist for more than ten years had a mode of 4. Participants who have been United Methodist for ten years or less were more likely to say that the course was effective in equipping them to be the most important influence on the religious and spiritual lives of their children than participants who had been United Methodist for more than ten years.

Conclusions

This research holds exciting possibilities for parents and pastors in the United Methodist Church, which will be addressed in Chapter 6.

CHAPTER SIX

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Conclusions

Conclusion 1: Parents report feeling generally well-equipped to be the most important influence on the religious and spiritual lives of their children. When asked how equipped they felt by the church or by any other resources to be the most important influence on the religious and spiritual lives of their children, the most frequent rating was a 4 (between Moderately Well Equipped and Extremely Well Equipped). This is surprising given the results in from the National Study of Youth and Religion, and given the large number of parents who cited specific examples of ways that their churches could better equip them to be the most important influence on the religious and spiritual lives of their children. While parents report a sense of being well-equipped, I am left to wonder whether parents' definitions of being the most important influence on the religious and spiritual lives of their children would match Dean's definition.

Conclusion 2: Churches are doing a good job of informing parents that they are the single most important influence on the religious and spiritual lives of their children. In the preliminary survey, 75% of the respondents stated that a leader from their church had said to them that they were the single most important influence on the religious and spiritual lives of their children, and 95% either Somewhat Agree or Completely Agree that they are the single most important influence on the religious and spiritual lives of their children.

Conclusion 3: Regardless of how prepared parents feel to be the most important religious and spiritual influence on their children, most will still benefit from a formal class on the topic. In the case of this research, no matter how parents rated their confidence, knowledge, positivity, and equipment in the pre-class survey, almost every participant in the Parenting on Point class said that the class was at least moderately helpful in increasing their confidence, knowledge, positivity, and equipment in being the most important influence on the religious and spiritual lives of their children.

Conclusion 4: Length of membership in the United Methodist Church has no bearing on a parent's self-assessment of their confidence, knowledge, positivity, and equipment in being the most important influence on the religious and spiritual lives of their children. This research bears out the fact that just because a person has been a United Methodist for a long time, they are not necessarily more prepared to use Wesleyan means of grace as tools for practicing spiritual disciplines in the context of the family.

Conclusion 5: The seminar format with opportunities for participants to interact was very effective. When asked if they would recommend this course to their peers in their churches, 77% said that they would definitely recommend it. The following responses were given to the invitation to share other comments and observations about the experience of the Parenting on Point seminar:

“Excited to take notes and put into practice.”

“I think the members of our congregation would benefit from hearing this exact presentation and continue on in a ‘parent support’ basis.”

“I was hoping I would feel encouraged that what I was already doing was good and I was. I was also given concrete ideas.”

“Loved group work and activities, good to connect with other parents of varying ages and ages of children.”

“Good, practical suggestions.”

Conclusion 6: Parents need intentional opportunities to share with other parents in a directed way, and the church is the perfect starting point for this sharing and direction. Immediately at the conclusion of the seminar several participants stated that they wanted to get together again to follow up. Understanding the busyness of parental lives, I asked whether they would prefer to have a virtual follow-up or follow up in person. The majority response was that virtual follow-up would be acceptable in the short term but that they wanted to get together again in real life as well. There was general feedback that the seminar should be extended:

“More time/possibly more session, i.e., Wednesday evening fellowship or a family retreat.”

“More sessions, one for each means, maybe also in intra and summary session.”

“Day long or multiple sessions—this was just a sampling.”

“You could make this longer and in depth (more) to do a weekend long retreat. I loved it!”

“Wish we had more time.”

“Give more time.”

“Make it longer, more sessions, shorter times.”

“Maybe make a series out of it so we could do group discussions about how we carry out what we have learned and give helpful suggestions as we go.”

Recommendations

Two primary recommendations emerge from this research. First, it is imperative for local United Methodist churches to be intentional about offering resources for parents who want to be equipped to be the most important influence on the religious and spiritual lives of their children. Our Wesleyan heritage gives us the tools to do this work, and pastors and Christian educators need to encourage parents to use these tools in directed ways. Local churches need to understand themselves as the primary body responsible for equipping parents to be the primary spiritual influences on their children, and need to make such equipping a priority in their ministries. One missing piece of this research is the specific definition of what it looks like *in real life* for parents to live out their roles as the single most important influence on the religious and spiritual lives of their children; therefore this recommendation also includes the need for pastors and church leaders need to be more intentional about communicating what it looks like. Pastors and church leadership should address this definition in teaching, preaching, and mentoring.

The second recommendation is that The United Methodist Church (as a denomination) needs to be more intentional about publishing curriculum that is specifically created for local churches to equip parents for this work. Cokesbury, the United Methodist bookstore, is not currently highlighting any curriculum that focuses on helping parents guide their children in their spiritual lives or on helping churches equip parents to be the primary spiritual influence on their children's lives. The denomination has a wonderful opportunity to engage families in this way.

APPENDIX A
PRELIMINARY SURVEY

Parenting on Point

Demographic Information

* 1. Which of the following accurately reflects your current marital status?

☐ Single, never married

☐ Married

☐ Separated

☐ Divorced

☐ Other (please specify)

* 2. What are the ages and genders of any children who live with you more than half of the time?

	Age of Child	Gender of Child
Child 1	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>
Child 2	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>
Child 3	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>
Child 4	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>
Child 5	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>

* 3. Are you currently a member of a United Methodist Church?

☐ Yes

☐ No

* 4. If you are currently a member of a United Methodist Church, how long have you been a member of the church that you currently attend?

☐ 0-1 year

☐ 1-5 years

☐ 6-10 years

☐ More than 10 years

* 5. How long have you been a member of any United Methodist Church?

☐ 0-1 years

☐ 1-5 years

☐ 6-10 years

☐ More than 10 years

The Church's Role in Parenting

* 6. In her book *Almost Christian*, researcher Dr. Kenda Creasy Dean states that “the single most important influence on the religious and spiritual lives of adolescents is their parents. While other relatives, mentors, and youth ministers may be very influential, parents are most important in forming their children’s spirituality.”

Has a leader from your church ever said to you that you are the single most important influence on the religious and spiritual lives of your children?

☐ Yes

☐ No

☐ I don't remember

7. If this is the first time that you have heard that you are the single most important influence on the religious and spiritual lives of your children, does this information surprise you? Why or why not?

* 8. To what extent do you agree with the statement that you are the single most important influence on the religious and spiritual lives of your children?

Completely agree

Somewhat agree

I don't know

Somewhat disagree

Completely disagree

9. If you answered that you *somewhat or completely DISAGREE* in Question 8, who or what do you believe to be the single most important influence on the religious and the spiritual lives of your children?

10. If you answered that you *somewhat or completely AGREE* in Question 8, what do you believe is the role of your church in helping you prepare to be the single most important influence on the religious and spiritual lives of your children?

Final Rankings

* 11. On a scale of 1 to 5, how well has your church equipped you to be the single most important influence on the religious and spiritual lives of your children?

1		2		3		4		5
Not well at all								Extremely well
<input type="checkbox"/>		<input type="checkbox"/>		<input type="checkbox"/>		<input type="checkbox"/>		<input type="checkbox"/>

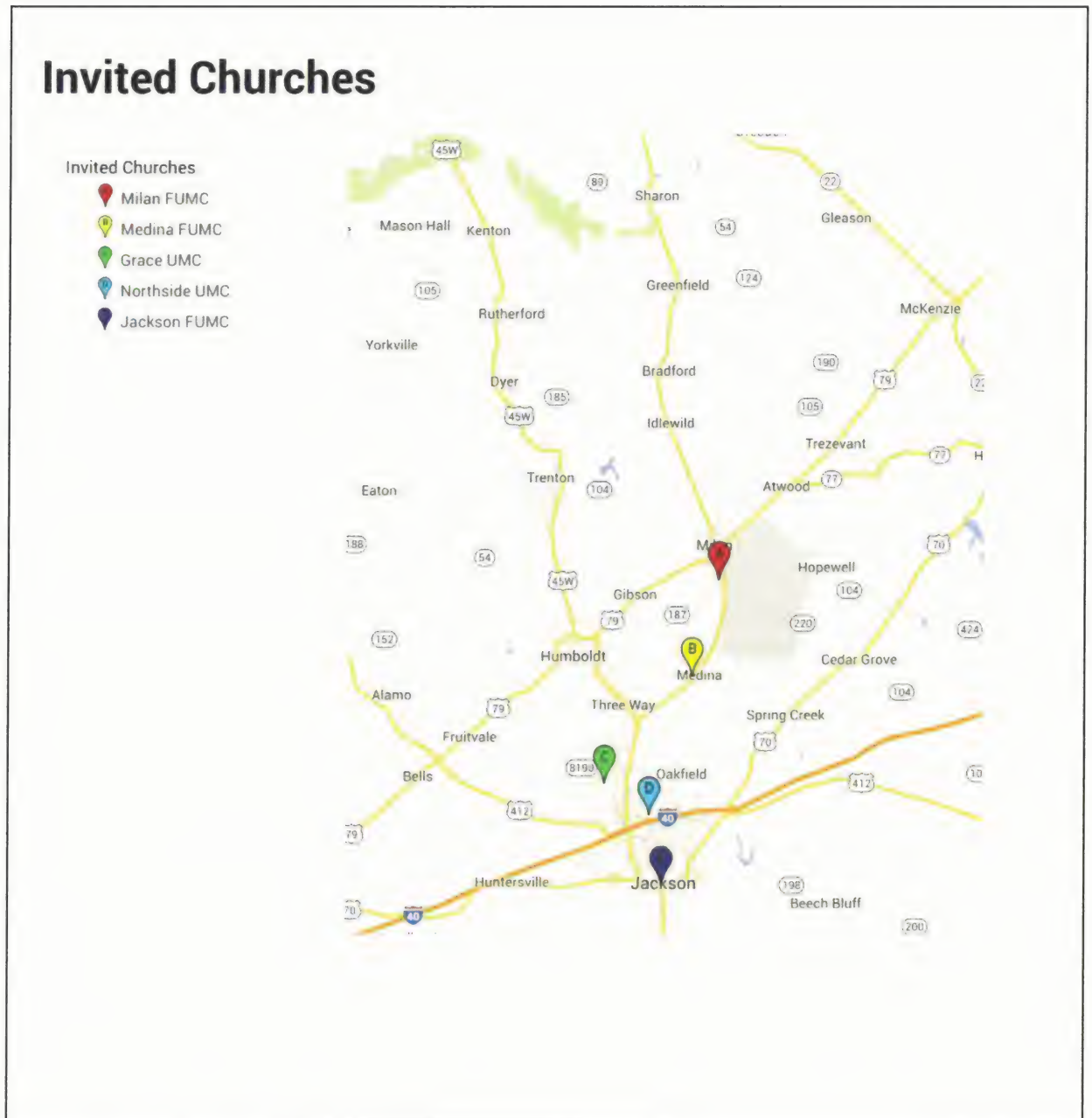
* 12. On a scale of 1 to 5, how well do you feel equipped to be the single most important influence on the religious and spiritual life of your children, whether or not your church has been intentional in giving you the tools to be that influence?

1		2		3		4		5
Not well at all								Extremely well
<input type="checkbox"/>		<input type="checkbox"/>		<input type="checkbox"/>		<input type="checkbox"/>		<input type="checkbox"/>

* 13. What is one thing your church could do to more adequately equip you to be the single most important influence on the religious and spiritual lives of your children?

APPENDIX B

INVITED CHURCHES



APPENDIX C
PRE-CLASS SURVEY

Parenting on Point, Pre-Class Survey

Demographic Information

* 1. Identification Number

* 2. Which of the following accurately reflects your current marital status?

☐ Single, never married

☐ Married

☐ Separated

☐ Divorced

☐ Other (please specify)

* 3. What are the ages and genders of any children who live with you more than half of the time?

	Age of Child	Gender of Child
Child 1	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>
Child 2	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>
Child 3	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>
Child 4	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>
Child 5	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>

* 4. Are you currently a member of a United Methodist Church?

☐ Yes

☐ No

☐ I don't know

* 5. If you are currently a member of a United Methodist Church, how long have you been a member of the church that you currently attend?

☐ 0-1 year

☐ 2-5 years

☐ 6-10 years

☐ More than 10 years

* 6. How long have you been a member of *any* United Methodist Church?

☐ 0-1 year

☐ 2-5 years

☐ 6-10 years

☐ More than 10 years

The Church's Role in Parenting

In her book *Almost Christian*, researcher Dr. Kenda Creasy Dean states that "the single most important influence on the religious and spiritual lives of adolescents is their parents. While other relatives, mentors, and youth ministers may be very influential, parents are most important in forming their children's spirituality."

7. On a scale from 1 to 5, how *knowledgeable* are you about how to influence the religious and spiritual lives of your children?

I have no knowledge at all

I have a moderate amount of knowledge

I am completely knowledgeable

1

2

3

4

5

☐☐☐☐☐

8. On a scale from 1 to 5, how *confident* are you in your ability to be the single most important influence on the religious and spiritual lives of your children (regardless of how you rated yourself in knowledge above)?

I have no confidence at all

I have a moderate amount of confidence

I am completely confident

1	2	3	4	5
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

9. If you rated yourself a 1, 2, or 3 in question 7, what would increase your confidence in your ability to be the single most important influence on the religious and spiritual lives of your children?

10. On a scale of 1 to 5, how *positive* do you feel about having the role of the primary spiritual influence on your children?

	Not positive at all	Some positive, some negative	Very positive	
1	2	3	4	5
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

11. On a scale from 1 to 5, how well has your church *equipped* you (given you the tools you need) to be the single most important influence on the religious and spiritual lives of your children?

Not well at all		Moderately Well	Extremely well	
1	2	3	4	5
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

12. What are some concrete actions that you have taken to influence the religious and spiritual lives of your children?

13. If your church could do one thing to help you be more *knowledgeable* about being the most important influence on the religious and spiritual lives of your children, what would it be?

14. If your church could do one thing to help you feel more *confident* in your ability to be the single most important influence on the religious and spiritual lives of your children, what would it be?

15. If your church could do one thing to help you feel more *positive* about your role as the primary spiritual influence on your children, what would it be?

16. If your church could do one thing to *equip you* in your role as the primary spiritual influence on your children, what would it be?

17. Please share any other reflections you might have about your role as the primary spiritual and religious influence on your children.

APPENDIX D
POST-CLASS SURVEY

Parenting on Point, Post-Class Survey

* 1. Identification Number

Results

The premise of this course has been that *knowledge of Wesley's means of grace and suggestions for implementing them within the family* can equip parents to be the single most important influence on the religious and spiritual lives of their children.

2. On a scale from 1 to 5, how effective was this course in increasing your *knowledge* about how to influence the religious and spiritual lives of your children?

Not effective at all	Moderately effective	Extremely effective		
1	2	3	4	5
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

3. On a scale of 1 to 5, how effective was this course in increasing your *confidence* in your ability to be the single most important influence on the religious and spiritual lives of your children?

Not effective at all	Moderately effective	Extremely effective		
1	2	3	4	5
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

4. On a scale of 1 to 5, how effective was this course in helping you feel more *positive* about your role as the primary spiritual influence of your children?

Not effective at all	Moderately effective	Extremely effective		
1	2	3	4	5
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

5. On a scale of 1 to 5, how well has this course *equipped* you to be the primary spiritual influence on the religious and spiritual lives of your children?

Not well at all	Moderately well	Extremely well
-----------------	-----------------	----------------

1

2

3

4

5

6. If your church offered this course to parents in your congregation, how likely would you be to recommend that they take it?

☐☐☐☐☐

Not likely at all

I would definitely recommend it

1

2

3

4

5

☐☐☐☐☐

7. What changes would you make to this course to make it more effective for others like you?

8. What other comments or observations would you like to share about this experience?

APPENDIX E
PARENTING ON POINT FLYER



Parenting on Point

Did you know that you are the most important
spiritual influence on your children's lives?

Even more influential than pastors,
youth pastors, media, and friends?

Fortunately, our Methodist tradition has equipped us with the tools we need
to live out God's calling for us to be our children's primary spiritual influences.

Now you have a chance to learn what those tools are, how to use them in
your own life, and how to incorporate them into your family's life.

Join us for fellowship, learning, and conversation as we make this
parenting journey together!

When: August 30, 3:00-5:30pm with CHILDCARE PROVIDED

Where: Northside United Methodist Church, 2571 North Highland Avenue, Hope Hall

Cost: Free, but please register in advance at parentingonpoint.eventbrite.com
or with this QR code

Snacks will be provided for adults and children



APPENDIX F
PARENTING ON POINT SCRIPT

1. Welcome! Thank you for being here today. I want to tell you a little bit about who I am and what I'm doing here, and then let you talk to each other about who you are and what you're doing here.

My name is Mary Beth Bernheisel and I'm the pastor of Medina First United Methodist Church. I'm also mother to two children. Joshua is nine and Clare is eight. And I'm married to the man that I think is the best dad in the world, Jay Bernheisel.

2. Several years ago I read a book that changed my life, but that happens every day. In this particular instance I read a book called *Almost Christian* by Rev. Dr. Kenda Creasy Dean, a United Methodist pastor and professor at Princeton Seminary.
3. In the book, among other life-changing things, she said, "The single most important influence on the religious and spiritual lives of adolescents is their parents. While other relatives, mentors, and youth ministers may be very influential, parents are most important in forming their children's spirituality."

As a youth pastor at the time, the one thought I had was, "Whoa. There are parents who are sending their kids to youth group thinking that I'm the one who's supposed to spiritually form them, when, in reality, that's their job! The things that I do, while important, are just supposed to reinforce the stuff that's going on at home."

And that's how we ended up here. Because as a parent and as a pastor I want to know if we as Methodists already have the tools to equip parents for this massive work. I've asked you to fill out a survey already, and will ask you to fill out another one, because this was important enough to me that I've chosen to write a doctoral dissertation about it. But research project or not, I think this is a crucial question that I have to ask myself as a parent and United Methodist pastor.

As we begin I want to let you know that many of our conversations are going to have time limits. Just as we as families often have to squeeze out time together to do the work of spiritual formation, we are going to have to be mindful of our time together here. These conversations could go on all day long, so when I give you time limits please know that it's not because I'm certain you've exhausted everything you need to talk about, but because we need to make the most of our time together.

4. Now, back to you. Everyone should have a nametag, and your nametag has colored stickers on it that correspond to the ages of children in your household who are in the age range that we're going to be talking about today. If you have a child from 0-2 years of age you have a blue sticker. If you have a child from 3-5 years of age you have a yellow sticker. If you have a child from 6-9 years of age you have a green sticker. And if you have a child 10-13 years of age you have a red sticker. I am also aware that several of you have children who are living with Jesus right now. If you would like to take another sticker to represent those children you are welcome to do that. Every table has a sheet of extra stickers. For the next five minutes, total, I would like for you to share around the table the names and ages of your children, even those who aren't living or who aren't living with you, the place you'd like to live when you retire, and what you hope to learn today.

But before you do that, I want to acknowledge that for some of you table discussion is not the most comfortable situation, and for others of you it may feel very comfortable. So this is what I would love for you to be mindful of: If you love this kind of group interaction, be attentive to those who may not feel as comfortable participating, and attentive to ways that you can gently and thoughtfully bring them into the conversation, just as you might gently and thoughtfully bring a more reserved child into conversations around your home. And if this kind of group interaction is not your thing, I invite you to embrace the discomfort, test the waters, and put yourself out there in your group, in the same way that you might model for your children how to learn to join conversations that they might not be comfortable with.

Your five minutes starts now!

5. As I mentioned earlier, the question I have for us, for the universe, for Methodists, for whomever, is this: Do we already have the tools in place for being the most important influence on the religious and spiritual lives of our children? And if we do, how do we use them most effectively in our seeking to be the primary spiritual influences on our children?
6. And so I begin with the spiritual disciplines that John Wesley outlined in his writings. He called these spiritual disciplines the "means of grace" and defined them as the "ordinary channels of conveying his grace to the souls of men."
7. And the means of grace that Wesley outlines are these: "prayer, whether in secret or with the great congregation; searching the Scriptures (which implies reading, hearing, and meditating thereon;) and receiving the Lord's Supper, eating bread and drinking

wine in remembrance of Him; And these we believe to be ordained of God, as the ordinary channels of conveying his grace to the souls of men.”

8. In a later sermon Wesley adds “using such a measure of fasting or abstinence as our bodily health allows.”

Today we are going to talk about the first three: receiving the Lord’s Supper, which we will broaden to worship, searching the Scriptures, and prayer.

9. We’re going to start with Worship and the Lord’s Supper. John Wesley names one of the means of grace as receiving the Lord’s Supper, but in the Anglican Church where John Wesley was a priest, you would have never had a worship service without also receiving the Lord’s Supper, so I’ve taken the liberty of rolling it all into one.

I want to insert a note here about the means of grace that I will be emphasizing throughout our time together, and that is that one of the key characteristics of the means of grace is that we engage in them intentionally. The point of them is that we are intentional and thoughtful about setting aside time for them. That is not a guarantee that something magical or instantly transformational is going to happen when we participate in them, but we are to be intentional about them as a way of setting aside time that is only for God so that God can work on us from the inside.

Kind of like going to the dentist, although that’s a terrible analogy. You don’t go to the dentist on the run. You have to make an appointment, sit in the chair, and make yourself available to the dentist so that the dentist can work on you.

God forgive me for that analogy.

So we’re going to start each of these discussions with the assumption that our efforts are intentional rather than haphazard, and planned instead of spontaneous.

I want to begin by raising two key points about worship as we start to think about how to do it as a family and do it in a way requires us to take responsibility for the spiritual formation of our children.

10. The first is this. One of the revolutionary things that John Wesley did in his reformation of the Anglican Church was to emphasize small group meetings. People who were new to the Anglican Church might meet in societies once a week to hear preaching and celebrate the Lord’s Supper. Those who were growing in their faith would go to class meetings where they were accountable to their brothers and sisters

in the faith for their actions throughout the week. And those who were interested in even more accountability might participate in bands.

But the one thing that John Wesley would not abide, no matter how many small groups you went to each week, was neglecting worship and the Lord's Supper, because, remember, the people in these small groups were still Anglicans and as such worshiped together on Sunday.

In fact, Wesley frequently reminded these early Methodists that "liturgical worship provided spiritual nurture that they would abandon at their grave loss."

In other words, we can read as many devotionals as we like, go to Sunday school twice a week, and participate in all the Beth Moore studies we want, but absolutely nothing—hear me say that NOTHING—will replace the nurture and formation of the worship service.

11. Wesley highlights formal prayers, Scripture, lectionary, the keeping of the liturgical year, singing of hymns, and hearing the preached word—and OF COURSE the receiving of the sacrament of the Lord's Supper—as integral parts of the worship service.

Formal prayers help worshipers be objective in what they pray for and how they pray for it, keeping pet concerns from being the sole focus of the prayer. For the majority of the life of Christianity the Scripture was heard in community rather than read, so the idea of reading the Scripture by myself and interpreting it outside of the context of the worshipping community was unheard of. The lectionary, or the schedule for reading Scripture, ensures that we are engaging the whole counsel of the Bible rather than the verses or sections that we like most. The keeping of the liturgical year is a corporate reminder that the church tells time differently than the rest of the world tells time—that our year begins as we anticipate the birth of the Messiah, climaxes at his resurrection, and then starts over as we tell the story again and again. Singing hymns is the way we proclaim together in the community what we believe, and of course to hear the preached word in community gives our life together a direction.

12. The other important point is this: When we have not intentionally and thoughtfully prepared ourselves for worship, we forget that worship is not a show put on for our benefit. Put another way, if our Sunday morning, or whatever day we worship, is consumed by putting out family fires and not by preparing ourselves for worship, then we will understand ourselves as the audience to be entertained by the worship service. We slide into the pew or chair a little rumples, harried from the run from the car to

the worship space, and think, “Here I am!! Fill me up! And make it good, because it was extra hard to get here today!”

In reality, the audience of our worship is God. The congregation—we—are the performers who are acting out our adoration of God, and those leading the worship—the song leaders, the pastor—they’re just there to give us the cues and whisper our lines to us.

We are not passive recipients of a worship event but engaged actors in a production of adoration and love of God.

How many of you have ever been in a play or other production?

And how many of you went on stage opening night without having prepared yourself mentally or physically for the production?

You didn’t, did you?

By the same token, as participants in the production of worship, we should always be prepared for our parts.

13. Each table has a piece of paper and a pen, and for the next two minutes I want you to list all of the things that get in the way of Sunday morning worship.

13a. They could be physical obstacles, emotional obstacles, or spiritual obstacles. They could be personal to you or affect your entire family.

14. You’ll need a scribe, of course, and you’ll need someone at your table who can be gently and thoughtfully responsible for making sure that everyone gets a chance to share. That means watching out for those who might like to be quiet and drawing them out. So take 30 seconds to assign those tasks. And then we’ll begin.

15. Now, I want you to go back through your list as a table and label each of those things with one of these three letters: D, M, and N.

D means that you can influence that obstacle the day before you worship. M means that you can influence that obstacle the morning of worship. And N means that you don’t have any influence over it at all.

Now, don't overanalyze these things. But for the next two minutes I want you to label these things as a group D, M, and N.

Now let's share all together what we came up with. Table 1, what was one day-before-worship obstacle that you could address? Table 2, what was one morning-of obstacle that you could address? Table 3, what was one obstacle that you found was totally out of your control? Table 4, what was one obstacle that you found was totally out of your control? Table 3, what was one day-before-worship obstacle that you could address? And Table 2, what was one morning-of-obstacle that you could address?

16. We're going to close out this section on worship and the Lord's Supper, and before you leave I'm going to provide some other ideas about how you might go about preparing yourself and your family for worship, but first I'm going to ask you to finish these sentences. You'll find them up here on the screen.

I hope . . .

I have . . .

I am . . .

I will . . .

I know . . .

I wish . . .

In the next three minutes, I'd like you to complete all of them. And when that time is up, I'm going to ask each of you to share two at your table. Our "sharing coach" will resume his or her duties to make sure that everyone gets a chance to share.

Wrap up. Take five minutes to go to the bathroom, get a snack, hug a friend, meet a stranger.

17. If we buy Kenda Dean's claim that parents are the single most important influence on adolescents, then we assume that there's some correlation between what our children see us do and what they do themselves.

We're going to start now with the practice of what Wesley called searching the Scripture. We might call it reading the Bible or having a devotion time. More than the other two practices we're going to talk about—worship and prayer—our practice as parents of searching the Scripture is going to profoundly affect the importance that our children and teenagers place on searching the Scripture themselves.

18. To get us thinking along these lines, here is our first activity together: At each table, each person should share one or two sentences—but no more than two—about a funny, embarrassing, or poignant moment when you realized that your child was imitating or copying what you do. I'll start. My eight-year-old daughter, who is my mini-me, fusses at her big brother with the same exasperated tone that I do when she wants him to do something.

Now, you have three minutes to go around your table and share a sentence or two apiece.

The point of that activity is to remind us that our children are going to be much more influenced by the things that they see us do than by things that we instruct them to do or by what they see others doing. That's sort of the point of what Kenda Dean says. We can send our kids to Sunday school and let them search the Scriptures with their Sunday school teachers, but the message that we might send that way is that Scripture is for church and not for home. If they see us studying the Bible at home then it's much more valuable to them.

19. I've listed here some of John Wesley's own instructions to his pastors, who were laypeople, remember—not ordained clergy—about how to read the Scripture. The first is to set apart a little time every morning and every evening for the reading of Scripture, the next is to read each day from both the Old and the New Testaments, the third is to pray for the guidance of the Holy Spirit as we read, and the last is to use our reading time to consistently examine our hearts.
20. Randy Maddox adds a few more guidelines that he thinks are important as well. They are to read with others, to read with the book of nature, and to read with a *discrimen* of God's pardon and love.

One of the distinguishing marks of Methodism is its emphasis on conferencing, which means nothing more complex than being in regular dialogue with other Christians who are also going on to perfection in holiness of heart and life. For Wesley, conferencing in the context of study meant consulting scholars by reading their works and by talking with others about the meanings and applications of Scripture.

The book of nature: Hard and soft sciences both have much to tell us about the way the world works, the way people behave and make decisions, the way people act in group settings, etc. These hard and soft sciences are means of God's revelation to us and should be brought into conversation with our reading, hearing, and meditating on Scripture.

Finally, we read with a *discrimen* of God's pardon and love, or at least that's what John Wesley would have us do. Every theologian and teacher uses a *discrimen*, or a lens, through which they interpret every piece of Scripture that they read. For some, everything they read is through a filter of God's righteous anger and judgment. For others, everything they read is through a filter, or lens, of God's predestining power over the circumstances of the world. For John Wesley, it was God's love of creation and God's pardon of creation. And for John Wesley, the Scriptures that most accurately depict God's true posture toward creation are Matthew's Sermon on the Mount, 1 Corinthians 13, and 1 John.

21. In the center of your table is an envelope with a bunch of pictures in it.
22. When I tell you to go, I'd like you to pick out a picture from the pile that most accurately expresses the way you feel about modeling the reading of Scripture with your children.

Alternately, you could pick a picture that best represents your current patterns of modeling the reading of Scripture in your home.

Many of those pictures are goofy and obtuse. Many of them still have text included in them. Don't overthink it. Don't try to be too literal. Go with your gut.

You have two minutes to look through the pictures and pick one.

23. Your two minutes are up. Now you have 3 minutes to go around your table and share the picture you chose and why you chose it.
24. Maybe the most obvious question is the one that we're afraid to ask. Why does it matter? Why does reading Scripture matter? If we can get it in church, that's great. If we're getting it in Sunday school, even better. But why at home, too? John Wesley would say that we read the Bible because it is the rule or guide for determining Christian belief.

Does anyone else have anything to add about why reading Scripture outside of church matters?

25. Because I believe that our greatest wisdom comes from inside our group and not necessarily from outside, we're going to spend a bit of time sharing wisdom with each other. I'm going to start out with a few ideas for you, and then we're going to

take it into our table groups to find out what practices are currently working for you, what you've tried that doesn't work, etc.

There are lots of ways to create a study or devotional plan. If you have older kids, you might want to challenge them to read through a book of the Bible or the Gospels or Leviticus if you're particularly cruel. For younger kids, you can decide what you'd like to read together.

26. The YouVersion is a great app that has a million different reading plans you can look through. John Wesley used the Anglican Book of Common Prayer for his reading plan, which is also an app you can download. It's the reading plan that I use personally and includes a Psalm, an Old Testament Reading, a New Testament Reading, and an Epistle Reading for each day.
27. Seasonal reading is a good way to start if you want to set aside some particular time to get yourself started. You can use a devotional guide for Advent or Lent. The one I have here is a devotional guide for Advent if you use a Jesse Tree in your home. There are lots of other seasonal devotionals that you can use, too.
28. Daily devotional reading. Get a devotional for kids and have a time to read in the car in the morning on the way to school, or on the way home from school.
29. If you want to take it a step further, journaling is a great way to read, study, and meditate. If daily reading together doesn't work for your family, consider having a time weekly to get together and talk about what you've read individually. If everyone has their own reading plan, each person can share what they've read and learned over the week. If everyone is using the same reading plan, you can go a little further in depth about what you've read.
30. Use any opportunity you have to marry what your kids are learning in school with what Scripture tells us about God. For example, if your little child is learning to count you can talk about how there is no highest number because numbers go on forever just like God goes on forever.
31. For the next five minutes I want you to share at least one of the following with the table: What has worked for you in the past or is working for you now, what hasn't worked for you, and/or what you might like to try going forward.

I want to check to see how we're doing with sharing together. Do we still need a sharing coach at each table or are we in a place where everyone's OK?

For the last minute before we spend a moment reflecting and then take a break, what's the best idea you've heard from your table? Just call it out.

32. Now, I'm not going to ask you to share with your table, but I am going to ask you to answer four of the following, just like we did the last time.

I hope . . . I have . . . I am . . . I will . . . I know . . . I wish . . .

And now we have 5 minutes to get a drink, go to the restroom, meet a friend, hug a stranger.

33. Before we go on, I want to remind you of the two principles that I hope you'll come away with along with some practices that will work for you and your family. We've already talked about one, and it's the premise that Kenda Dean introduced us to at the beginning. It's that we can send our kids to religious school, church, Sunday school, church camp, VBS, mission trips, etc., but it is ultimately their parents to whom they look for spiritual instruction and modeling.

The second one is this, which we've also already talked about . . . each of these means of grace is intended to be intentional. The reason we're talking about specific practices is because we want to be intentional about what we're doing. We don't want to set this really high bar, fail to meet it, and give up. We want to do things that will really work in the everyday lives of our families, with great intentionality. Intentionality is the opposite of spontaneity, and while yes, we want to be spontaneous—Look at that butterfly. Isn't it amazing how God made it from a caterpillar?—the bulk of what we do to nurture our children's spirituality needs to be planned. Otherwise we won't do it.

I think that intentionality is hardest when it comes to prayer, which is that last means of grace that we're going to talk about. Unless anyone really wants to tackle fasting.

34. Let's start out by talking about John Wesley and prayer. First of all, John Wesley called private prayer "the grand means of drawing nearer to God," and although he didn't have children of his own, he did give this advice to fathers (remember that this was a different time) in his sermon titled "On Family Religion."
35. To get started thinking about prayer, I'm going to give you two minutes to go around your table and share one of two things . . . or both: Either the prayer that you

remember most vividly from your own childhood OR the first prayer that you taught your own children.

I'll share with you to give everyone a chance to think for a second. The very first prayer I learned as a child was the blessing "God is great; God is good. Now we thank Him for our food." Which was a great first prayer because it taught me to say a blessing over the food, but I will share a horrifying moment when I was in high school. My boyfriend came over one night for dinner. This would have been fine except that I knew that I was going to have to say the blessing at dinner and I, in high school, had nothing more eloquent to say than God is great . . . and I tried so hard to make other plans with him that didn't include staying for dinner. And it didn't work. And I had to say the God is great prayer in front of my boyfriend, who was in college by the way. God is great is great. But do your children a favor before their teenage years and help them branch out to more sophisticated prayers.

Ready? Go!

36. When we talk about being intentional in our prayer life, one way to talk about it is to talk about having a "rule of prayer," and having a rule of prayer means that we have a time, place, and form for our prayer. When our parents taught us prayers like Now I Lay Me Down to Sleep or God Is Great—or when we teach our children those prayers—that's a rule of prayer. It's a time and place and a form. But unlike me in my embarrassing moment with the boyfriend who I'm sure had no idea the existential crisis I was in at the time, we can help our children develop more sophisticated rules of prayer the older that they get. So if we're going to make a rule of prayer, we need to think about what it is that is important about prayer and what we want our children to know about it.

To that end, you now have a new envelope on your table that contains several quotes about prayer.

37. When I give you the signal, I want you to look through those quotes and find the one that speaks to you. Go ahead and do that now, and when you're done look up at me for the next instruction.
38. Instead of talking about your own experience/understanding/or belief about prayer, I now want you to go around the table and share why it's important to you to communicate *this* particular experience/understanding/or belief about prayer to your children.

You have five minutes. Go.

39. Your next assignment is this: As a table, I want you to create a Rule of Prayer together. Just one for the table. But I want you to make it as creatively extravagant and impossible to keep as you possibly can. For example, here's mine.

You have three minutes to do this and then we're going to share with the large group.

40. Now that we've gone way overboard, I'm going to give you some time to think about the way you might start a Rule of Prayer in your own family.
41. Instead of completing sentences like we have the last few times, this time I'm going to ask you to think on your own or think out loud with your tablemates about how you might go about creating a Rule of Prayer.
42. When will you do it? In the morning, in the evening? At mealtime?
43. Where will you do it? Some of you have family altars. Some of you might want to it around the fire. Maybe the fire pit outside? What is sacred space for your family?
44. And what form will it take?

Will be all spontaneous prayer? Will it be a prayer that you've all memorized, like the Lord's Prayer? Will it be a mix of both? If you use prayers that someone else has written, where will you look for them? What would it look like if everyone in your family introduced prayers to each other and created a book with your family's collection of prayers? What would it look like if everyone worked to write a prayer to go into your collection?

You have five minutes.

Your five minutes are up, so let's take a stand-up break before we wrap up.

45. Questions? Thank you and fill out the post-class survey.

APPENDIX G

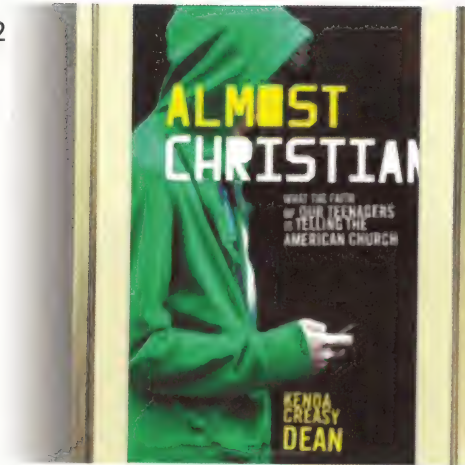
PARENTING ON POINT PREZI

1



Parenting on Point

2



3

The single most important influence on the religious and spiritual lives of adolescents is their parents.

While other relatives, mentors, and youth ministers may be very influential, parents are most important in forming their children's spirituality.

4

Share at your table

- Names and ages of your children
- Where you want to live when you retire
- One thing you hope to learn today



6

Means of Grace

"The ordinary channels of conveying [God's] grace to the souls of men"

~John Wesley's sermon titled "Means of Grace"

7

From "The Means of Grace"

prayer, whether in secret or with the great congregation; **searching the Scriptures** (which implies reading, hearing, and meditating thereon;) and **receiving the Lord's Supper**, eating bread and drinking wine in remembrance of Him; And these we believe to be ordained of God, as the ordinary channels of conveying his grace to the souls of men

8

From "The Scripture Way of Salvation"

..."and using such a measure of fasting or abstinence as our bodily health allows."

9

*Worship
and the
Lord's
Supper*



10

On Worship

"liturgical worship provided spiritual nurture that they would abandon at their grave loss."

—Randy Maddox, *Responsible Grace*

11

Other Critical Elements of Worship

- Formal Prayers
- Scripture
- Lectionary
- Liturgical Year
- Singing Hymns
- Preached Word

12

Preparing Ourselves to be Actors in Worship

13



13a

As a Table...

List all of the things that get in the way of your participation in Sunday morning worship.

- Physical, emotional, spiritual
- Self and family

14

But first...

- Assign a scribe
- Assign a "sharing coach"
- Ready? GO!

15

Assign a letter to each item you listed:

- **D:** Something you can influence the day before worship
- **M:** Something you can influence the morning of worship
- **N:** Something over which you have no influence at all

16

Answer 4...Share 2

- I hope...
- I have...
- I am...
- I will...
- I know...
- I wish...

17



18

Share...

a funny, embarrassing, or poignant moment when you realized that your child was imitating or copying what you do or one of your habits.

19

Wesley's Guidelines

- Set apart a little time every morning and every evening for reading scripture
- Read each day from both the Old and New Testaments
- Pray for the guidance of the Holy Spirit as we read
- Constantly examine our hearts as we read

20

A Few More Guidelines

- Read with others
- Read with the "book of nature"
- Read with a *discrimen* of God's pardon and love

21

Pick a Picture That...

...can best describe the way you feel about reading the word of God.

Or...

...can describe the way you feel about the way you are reading the word of God.

And Share...

the pictures created only you have to

22

Pick a Picture That...

- ...most accurately expresses the way you feel about modeling the reading of scripture with your children

OR

- ...best represents your current patterns of modeling the reading of scripture in your home.

23

And Share...

...the picture you chose and why you chose it

24

Why Does it Matter?

- John Wesley says: Because it is the rule or guide for determining Christian belief.
- What do you say?

25



26



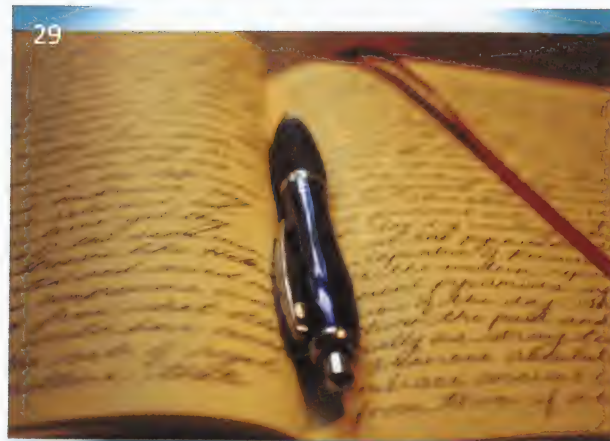
27



28



29



30



31

At Your Table...

- ...what have you tried that works for your family?
- ...what have you tried that doesn't work for you family?
- ...what is something that you'd like to try going forward?

32

Answer 4 ..

- I hope...
- I have...
- I am...
- I will...
- I wish...
- I know...

33



34

"On Family Religion"

"you should take care that they have some time every day for reading, meditation, and prayer; and you should inquire whether they do actually employ that time in the exercises for which it is allowed. Neither should any day pass without family prayer, seriously and solemnly performed."

35

Share at your table...

- The prayer that you remember most vividly from your own childhood

OR

- The first prayer that you taught your own children

36

Rule of Prayer

- Time
- Place
- Form

37

Step 1

Select a quote about prayer that closely resembles your own understanding or experience or belief about prayer.

38

Step 2

Share why it's important to you to communicate this experience/ understanding/or belief about prayer to your children

39

The Bernheisel Rule of Prayer

- Time: We will rise at 5:00am and pray until 6:00am
- Place: We will sit in kitchen chairs around the kitchen table
- Form: The first 30 minutes of prayer will be silent. The last 30 minutes will be spent translating the 1551 Book of Common Prayer from the original Latin.

40



41



42



43

Where?

- Where is a sacred space for you?

44

Form

- A good rule of thumb is to mix formal prayers and extemporaneous prayers.
- Where could your formal prayers come from?
 - Book of Common Prayer
 - Devotional Guide
 - Create your own collection

45



APPENDIX H

PARENTING ON POINT MASTER CURRICULUM

Spiritual Disciplines, Church, and Home

Wesleyan Means of Grace for Families

Mary Beth Bernheisel

5/20/2015

I.

INTRODUCTION

In 2002, sociologists Christian Smith and Melinda Denton embarked on a research study that they anticipated would provide them with helpful information about the religious lives of young people in the United States. They called their study *The National Study of Youth and Religion*, and they published their first set of findings in 2005 in *Soul Searching: The Religious and Spiritual Lives of American Teenagers*. Five years later, Dr. Kenda Creasy Dean, Professor of Youth, Church, and Culture at Princeton University, authored *Almost Christian*, a text designed to help churches in the United States figure out how to respond to Smith and Denton's findings, not by "fixing" young people but by taking a long, hard look at the church as a whole. Perhaps the most important statement she makes in her book, at least for the purposes of this project, is this:

The single most important influence on the religious and spiritual lives of adolescents is their parents. While other relatives, mentors, and youth ministers may be very influential, parents are most important in forming their children's spirituality.¹

If Smith, Denton, and Dean had hopped in a time machine and traveled to eighteenth-century England, Rev. John Wesley would gladly have told them the same thing. While the intervening years convinced us as a society that "experts" could perfect our children by giving them the right cognitive and spiritual tools for navigating the world, Wesley knew long ago that the locus of spiritual formation was the home and that the best facilitators of spiritual maturity were mothers and fathers.

But how?

John Wesley and the Means of Grace: The What

In his sermon titled "The Means of Grace" John Wesley defines the means of grace as

prayer, whether in secret or with the great congregation; searching the Scriptures; (which implies reading, hearing, and meditating thereon;) and receiving the Lord's Supper, eating bread and drinking wine in remembrance of Him: And these we

¹ Kenda Creasy Dean, *Almost Christian: What the Faith of Our Teenagers Is Telling the American Church* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 203.

believe to be ordained of God, as the ordinary channels of conveying his grace to the souls of men.²

In his sermon titled “The Scripture Way of Salvation,” Wesley elaborates on the means of grace, dividing them into “works of piety” and “works of mercy.” Works of piety he defines as “public prayer, family prayer, and praying in our closet; receiving the supper of the Lord; searching the Scriptures, by hearing, reading, meditating; and using such a measure of fasting or abstinence as our bodily health allows.”³ Works of mercy are defined by Wesley as any works that affect the body or soul “such as feeding the hungry, clothing the naked, entertaining the stranger, visiting those that are in prison, or sick, or variously afflicted . . .”⁴

John Wesley and the Means of Grace: The Why

It is important to note that neither John Wesley nor any other reputable teacher of spiritual disciplines (of which the means of grace are but a few) claim that these disciplines are a “magic bullet.” There is no claim that if they are practiced regularly or with great diligence—or even with great sincerity—anything magically transformational will happen. What Wesley and others *do* claim is that

There is no power in this. It in itself is a poor, dead, empty thing: separate from God, it is a dry leaf, a shadow. Neither is there any *merit* in my using this, nothing intrinsically pleasing to God, nothing whereby I deserve any favour at his hands, no, not a drop of water to cool my tongue. But because God bids, therefore I do; because he directs me to wait in this way, therefore here I wait for his free mercy . . .⁵

In what may be more accessible language, author Richard Foster claims that “by themselves, the Spiritual Disciplines can do nothing; they can only get us to the place where something can be done. They are God’s means of grace.”⁶ Foster uses the analogy of a farmer planting crops. The farmer cannot *make* the seeds grow into crops. The farmer only creates the optimal *conditions* that might allow the seeds to grow into crops. In the same way, the means of grace—and other spiritual disciplines—do not transform us. They simply provide us with the optimal conditions by which the grace of God *working* in us can transform us.

² Albert C. Outler and Richard P. Heitzenrater, eds., *John Wesley’s Sermons: An Anthology* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1991), 160.

³ Outler and Heitzenrater, *John Wesley’s Sermons*, 378.

⁴ Outler and Heitzenrater, *John Wesley’s Sermons*, 378.

⁵ Outler and Heitzenrater, *John Wesley’s Sermons*, 170.

⁶ Richard J. Foster, *Celebration of Discipline: The Path to Spiritual Growth* (New York: HarperOne, 1998), 7.

The Purpose of This Class

The means of grace are practices that open us to the work of God in our lives, and the work of God in our lives transforms us into Christian disciples who are being perfected in love of God and love of neighbor. This is the spiritual formation that we should desire for ourselves and for our children.

If it is true that parents are the primary spiritual influences on their children—and I am convinced that it is—then might these means of grace outlined by Wesley so long ago be adequate tools for parents to use as they seek to fulfill the role of primary spiritual influences? This purpose of this class is to explore just that.

The Format of the Class

Each week we will discuss one of the means of grace outlined by Wesley: prayer, fasting, searching the Scriptures, and the Lord's Supper (worship). We will explore the purpose of that particular discipline, how parents can incorporate it into their own lives as a personal practice, and how parents can introduce it as a practice to be used by the family.

To the extent that it is possible, you should implement *some* form of the practice each week in your own life and be prepared to talk about your experience of it at our subsequent meeting.

Our conversations will be informal, and questions are welcomed and encouraged!

II.

PRAYER

Wesleyan scholar Randy Maddox notes that John Wesley called private prayer “the grand means of drawing nearer to God,”⁷ and in case there is any question about Wesley’s commitment to the practice of prayer for all Christians, one need only note that Wesley authored multiple collections of prayers for individuals, families, and even children. Wesley’s journals reflect his own personal commitment to prayer, noting that he prayed throughout the day: by himself early in the morning and late in the evening, and with others whenever the opportunity presented itself throughout the day.⁸

Though he was never married and had no children of his own, Wesley was passionate about the place of prayer and other spiritual disciplines in the context of the family. In his sermon titled “On Family Religion,” Wesley wrote to fathers regarding their families,

you should take care that they have some time every day for reading, meditation, and prayer; and you should inquire whether they do actually employ that time in the exercises for which it is allowed. Neither should any day pass without family prayer, seriously and solemnly performed.⁹

In whatever way the practice of prayer in the family is approached, it is important to remember the classical understanding of all spiritual disciplines: their practice should always be intentional and planned, and never haphazard or left to chance.

Getting Started: Create Your Own Rule of Prayer¹⁰

A rule of prayer is an intentional time, place, and form of prayer to which you commit on a daily basis. The purpose of a rule of prayer is to make prayer a habit rather than a practice that we do only when we feel like it or when we feel that we have something to pray about or to pray for. This doesn’t mean that we can only pray at one time, in one place, and in one way during the day, but it ensures that we have intentionally opened ourselves to God’s gift of grace at least once in the

⁷ Randy Maddox, *Responsible Grace: John Wesley’s Practical Theology* (Nashville: Kingswood Books, 1994), 214.

⁸ Charles Yrigoyen Jr., *John Wesley: Holiness of Heart & Life* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1996), 44.

⁹ John Wesley, “On Family Religion,” General Board of Global Ministries of the United Methodist Church; accessed April 17, 2015, <http://www.umcmission.org/Find-Resources/John-Wesley-Sermons/Sermon-94-On-Family-Religion>.

¹⁰ Many of the ideas for creating practices related to Wesley’s means of grace are adapted from the book *Habits of a Child’s Heart: Raising Your Kids with the Spiritual Disciplines* by Valerie Hess and Marti Watson Garrett (Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 2004).

day. Nor does this mean that we have to make a particular rule that we will maintain throughout our lives. Our rule will change as our lives do.

Time: Committing to a particular time for prayer means that we can't get away with putting it off until we feel like doing it or until it's more convenient. Consider what time of day you could commit to regularly. Morning? Lunchtime? Evening?

Place: When we commit to a particular place for prayer it gradually becomes a sacred space to us, and a place that we always associate with our prayer practice. It might be the church sanctuary, a particular chair in your house, or a small altar that you create out of meaningful symbols. What kind of space is available to you? What kind of space can you create?

Form: Prayers written by other people and taken from a variety sources can help us enhance our own ways of praying, give us new words to use, and move us beyond ourselves into a whole new way of thinking about God, God's work, and God's kingdom. Consider making a pre-written prayer part of your own rule, as well as extemporaneous prayers that convey your own needs, desires, questions, worries, and celebrations.

~~~~~

*If you currently have a rule of prayer, write it down below.*

*What time do you pray?*

*Where do you pray?*

*What form does your prayer take?*

*If you do not currently have a rule of prayer, jot down some ideas you have about the time, the place, and the form of prayer to which you think God might be calling you to commit.*

~~~~~

Moving Along: Creating a Rule of Prayer for Your Family

Set aside a particular time each day for your family to pray together in the same way you set aside time each day to pray privately. The same guidelines apply for a family rule of prayer as an individual rule of prayer: there should be a particular time, place, and form for your prayer. You may find that the best time to do this is in the evening when your family has come back together after a busy day. Of course getting four or six people in the same place at the same time is much more difficult than getting one person in the right place at the right time, but you will find that the more it becomes a rule in your family, the easier it will be to carry it out—and the more everyone will miss it if you fall out of practice.

Creating a Rule that Includes Young Children: If you have young children, your rule of prayer should be simple. At mealtime and at bedtime, pray a simple, memorized prayer. Follow it with a short time for spontaneous prayer in which anyone can add other concerns or joys that they would like to express. The beauty of this form is that it gives children memorized words that they can use to express themselves while still letting them offer the concerns and desires of their hearts.

You can also encourage young children to express spontaneous prayers throughout the day for the things that concern them or things for which they are grateful.

Creating a Rule That Includes Older Children: Older children might enjoy working together or working with you to create a family prayer book—a collection of prayers written by family members or accessed from other sources. You might come across well-articulated prayers on blogs or on social media that you would like to include. If you use a devotional book for your quiet time, it might include prayers that you would like to put in your prayer book. Classic resources that include pre-written prayers include *The Book of Common Prayer* and *The United Methodist Book of Worship*.

If you are feeling particularly industrious, two particularly Wesleyan resources might offer some inspiration for your prayer book. The first, *John Wesley's Prayers for Children, Youth, and the Childlike* is a collection of prayers that most children now would likely find almost completely inaccessible. That resource can be found here:

<https://www.google.com/webhp?sourceid=chrome-instant&ion=1&espv=2&ie=UTF-8#q=john%20wesley%20prayers%20for%20children>

Consider reading through these prayers and working alongside your children to “translate” them into modern and accessible language. Then you can use them as part of

your family rule of prayer, and your children will have a sense of having helped “write” them.

David deSilva has adapted John Wesley’s “A Collection of Forms of Prayer for Every Day of the Week” in a small book entitled *Praying with John Wesley*. It is easily obtained, and the prayers within could also be useful for your family rule of prayer. Like *John Wesley’s Prayers for Children, Youth, and the Childlike*, they might need to be “translated” into modern and accessible language.

If the idea of creating a prayer book is daunting, simply find some pre-written prayers to mix with your spontaneous prayers, and enjoy your time together.

Remember, all you need for a family rule of prayer is a time, a place, and a form.

~~~~~

*If your family currently has a rule of prayer, write it down below.*

*What time do you pray?*

*Where do you pray?*

*What form does your prayer take?*

*If your family currently has a rule of prayer but you would like to modify it, how is God calling you to do so?*

*If you do not currently have a rule of prayer, jot down some ideas you have about the time, the place, and the form of prayer to which you think God might be calling your family to commit.*

~~~~~

III.

SEARCHING THE SCRIPTURES

In answer to his own question, “Why did John Wesley read the Bible, and so strongly encourage his followers to do the same?” theologian Randy Maddox tells us, “Because it is the rule or guide for determining Christian belief!”¹¹

John Wesley had high expectations of both himself and other Methodists when it came to searching the Scriptures. Some of his guidelines for both clergy and laypeople in searching the Scriptures were

- To set apart a little time every morning and every evening for reading Scripture.
- To read each day from both the Old Testament and New Testament.
- To follow the “rule of faith”* in our reading.
- To pray for the guidance of the Holy Spirit as we read.
- To consistently examine our hearts as we read.¹²

We should note that there is a difference between reading the Scripture, hearing the Scripture, and meditating on the Scripture, although John Wesley rarely addressed these three activities separately. Studying the Scripture as Wesley did in Greek or Hebrew with commentaries by other theologians is a very different activity than meditating on those same Scriptures. As Valerie Hess notes in *Habits of a Child's Heart*, “While the Discipline of Meditation asks, ‘What does this mean *for me personally*?’ the Discipline of Study asks, ‘What does this mean?’ Meditation is subjective; study is objective.”¹³

That being said, we can reasonably expect to give time both to meditating on Scripture and to studying Scripture as we practice this discipline as a family.

Randy Maddox has a few other guidelines to add to our reading, hearing, and meditating on the Scripture:¹⁴

- **Read with others.** One of the distinguishing marks of Methodism is its emphasis on conferencing, or being in regular dialogue with other Christians who are also being perfected in love of God and love of neighbor. For Wesley, conferencing in

¹¹ Randy Maddox, “The Rule of Christian Faith, Practice, and Hope: John Wesley on the Bible,” *Methodist Review* 3 (2011): 30-31.

¹² Barry E. Bryant, “John Wesley on ‘Searching the Scriptures’: Reading, Meditating, Hearing, Doing” (paper presented at the Oxford Institute of Methodist Theological Studies, 2007), 8.

¹³ Hess, *Habits of a Child's Heart*, 66.

¹⁴ Maddox, “The Rule of Christian Faith, Practice, and Hope,” 17-30.

the context of study meant consulting scholars by reading their works and entering in to conversations with others about the meanings and applications of Scripture.

- **Read with the “book of nature.”** Hard and soft sciences both have much to tell us about the way the world works, the way that people behave and make decisions, the way people act in group settings, etc. These are means of God’s revelation to us and should be brought into conversation with our reading, hearing, and meditating upon Scripture.
- **Read with a *discrimen* of God’s pardon and love.** Every theologian and teacher uses a *discrimen*, or a lens, through which they interpret every piece of Scripture that they read. For some, this *discrimen* is God’s righteous anger and judgment. For others, it is God’s predestining power over the circumstances of the whole world. For John Wesley, it was God’s pardon of creation and God’s love of creation. For Wesley, the Scriptures that most accurately depict God’s true posture toward creation are Matthew’s Sermon on the Mount, 1 Corinthians 13, and the first Epistle of John.

Getting Started: Nurturing Your Own Discipline of Searching the Scriptures

The same rule applies to searching the Scripture as does the rule of prayer. Your time of searching the Scriptures should be intentional and focused rather than haphazard and left to chance. Once you’ve determined a time and place for your hearing, reading, and meditating, here are some suggestions to consider:

- If you haven’t already joined a Bible study or Sunday school class, consider joining one. Small groups were an integral part of early Methodism, and Wesley had no doubt that such conferencing together was a major part of our transformation as Christian disciples.
- Create a reading plan—or adopt a reading plan—that directs you to read a portion of Scripture each day. John Wesley used the daily readings from *The Book of Common Prayer*. The YouVersion app for iPhone and Android has many reading plans to choose from and can give you daily reminders to read.
- When you’ve read Scripture for the day, choose a word or phrase that God brings to your attention to keep with you throughout the day. When you find yourself in quiet moments—or needing to find a quiet moment—bring this word or phrase to mind and allow it to center you.

- If you don't already have a study Bible, purchase one to use regularly. As you read Scripture, pay attention to the study notes that might be at the bottom of the page or in the margins. Follow Scripture cross-references to see what you might find.

~~~~~  
*Spend some time considering your own practices for reading, hearing, and meditating on Scripture. Like prayer, searching the Scripture should be an intentional, set-apart time of letting God speak to you through the Bible.*

*How often do you read, hear, and meditate on Scripture?*

*Do you use any study aids or commentaries?*

*How do you decide what you are going to read, hear, or meditate on?*

*Are you currently part of a small group or Sunday school class with whom you study Scripture regularly?*

*If you do not currently have a practice of reading, hearing, and meditating on Scripture, jot down some ideas you have about the time you might study, study aids you might use, or reading plans you might adopt.*

~~~~~  
Searching the Scripture with Your Family

Determine with your family the frequency with which you will search the Scriptures individually and together.

Individually, encourage your children to read the Bible each day or to read it with you each day, ideally with an age-appropriate devotional guide that they can read alone or that you can read to them aloud. If you read together, allow time for your child to respond. Encourage him or her to reflect on what you've just read together.

As a family, commit to searching the Scriptures together. Some families may have the opportunity to search the Scriptures together daily, some several times a week, and some once per week. Whatever your family chooses, choose something to which you can reasonably commit. Choose a reading plan such as one of the ones mentioned above, or create your own. If your child doesn't already have an age-appropriate study Bible (*The*

Adventure Bible and *Deep Blue Bible* are both excellent study Bibles for children) be sure to purchase one.

Including Young Children: In some ways, searching the Scripture is best done with children who can't yet read because they get to experience the Scriptures as they were intended to be experienced—by hearing them. When your family convenes for a time of studying the Scripture, have someone in the family read the Scripture aloud with appropriate inflection and intonation.

Other activities invite further reflection on Scripture. If your children are in any sort of school setting, talk with them about some things that they are learning. Discuss ways that the things that they are learning can offer insight into the way that God created the world, how God sustains the world, and how God is redeeming the world.

For example, if your child is learning to count, you might talk about how God has ordered the world in a particular way, how there is no “highest number” because numbers are infinite, and how God is also infinite.

Encourage your child to choose a word or phrase from the Scripture you've read together and make it their centering word or phrase for the day or week.

For Older Children: Everyone should have a chance to hear the Scripture read aloud, so make sure that everyone in the family who *can* read *does* read. That way everyone also gets a chance to listen.

Older children can prepare a short Bible study based on the information contained in their study Bibles and the references that are located within a particular passage. Have them prepare a short study on their own and share it with the family at the time that you convene for your study. Rotate so that each member of the family who *can* prepare a study *does* prepare a study.

If everyone in your household can read and write on their own, consider using the SOAPY method of study as well. Instead of having one person prepare a study, ask everyone to keep a SOAPY journal to share when you come to your family Bible study. The SOAPY method calls for you to note the following in your journal: write out the key Scripture from the passage, Observe which verses or words God brought to your attention, consider how you can Apply the Scripture to your life, write a Prayers to God based on the verse or words that God brought to your attention, and consider what in your life you must Yield to God as a result of this study.

During the Observation section, encourage older children to pick a verse or phrase to be their centering verse or phrase during the coming week.

As with younger children, engage your older children in conversations about what they are learning in school, including how the things that they are learning can offer insight into the way that God created the world, how God sustains the world, and how God is redeeming the world.

*Simply put, the rule of faith is the identification of scriptural themes that have been recognized and accepted by theologians throughout the centuries. These broad themes include “the corruption of sin, justification by faith, the new birth, and present inward and outward holiness.”¹⁵ In other words, as we read, we should assume that the stories, songs, and letters that we are reading will tell us about at least one of those four themes.

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*Spend some time considering your family’s practices for reading, hearing, and meditating on Scripture. Like prayer, searching the Scripture should be an intentional, set-apart time of letting God speak to you through the Bible.*

*How often do you read, hear, and meditate on Scripture?*

*Do you use any study aids or commentaries?*

*How do you decide what you are going to read, hear, or meditate on?*

*If your family currently searches the Scripture together but you would like to modify that practice, how is God calling you to do so?*

*If you do not currently search the Scripture together, jot down some ideas you have about the time you might study and the form your study might take.*  
~~~~~

¹⁵ Maddox, “The Rule of Christian Faith, Practice, and Hope,” 22.

IV.

FASTING

John Wesley was serious about fasting. In fact, in his sermon titled “The Causes of the Inefficacy of Christianity,” he wrote

Why has Christianity done so little good, even among us? Among the Methodists? . . . Plainly because we have forgot, or at least not duly attended to those solemn words of our Lord, ‘If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow me.’¹⁶

For Wesley, the self-denial that Christ talks about in the Gospels is the self-denial that we find in the spiritual discipline of fasting. He goes on to say that “the man that never fasts is no more in the way to heaven than the man that never prays.”¹⁷

The purposes of fasting were many, according to Wesley. He summarized them in his seventh discourse on Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount:

Let our intention herein be this, and this alone, to glorify our Father which is in heaven; to express our sorrow and shame for our manifold transgressions of his holy law; to wait for an increase of purifying grace, drawing our affections to things above; to add seriousness and earnestness to our prayers; to avert the wrath of God, and to obtain all the great and precious promises which he hath made to us in Jesus Christ.¹⁸

The sorrow and shame that we express in our fast, according to Wesley, is directed to the sin of excess in our lives and to the sin of allowing ourselves to be distracted by trivial matters in our lives rather than focusing on eternal concerns.

Wesley also suggests that fasting requires us to reduce the amount of rich food that we eat. He states that rich and pleasurable foods are as detrimental to the mind as they are the body because they leave the mind “ripe for every pleasure of sense.”¹⁹ In other words, the experience of rich food encourages us to seek out other rich and pleasurable experiences that cause us to inappropriately indulge ourselves. The final end of such indulgence,

¹⁶ Outler and Heitzenrater, *John Wesley’s Sermons*, 555.

¹⁷ Outler and Heitzenrater, *John Wesley’s Sermons*, 555.

¹⁸ John Wesley, “Upon Our Lord’s Sermon on the Mount, 7,” General Board of Global Ministries of the United Methodist Church; accessed April 17, 2015, <http://www.umcmission.org/Find-Resources/John-Wesley-Sermons/Sermon-27-Upon-Our-Lords-Sermon-on-the-Mount-7>.

¹⁹ John Wesley, “Upon Our Lord’s Sermon on the Mount, 7.”

Wesley claims, is that we become consumed with our own pleasure and forget the importance of giving all that we possibly can to God. He also emphasizes that fasting provides the opportunity for prolonged periods of prayer.

While the most widely recognized fast among Christians is Jesus' fast in the wilderness that launched his public ministry, one-day fasts and half-fasts were typical in the ancient church. A one-day fast lasted from morning until evening, and the half-fast was practiced on Wednesdays and Fridays by fasting from morning until about 3:00 pm. Wesley practiced the half-fast for most of his life.

While he could not overemphasize the importance of fasting, he did offer concessions to those who were weak or ill by suggesting that they simply reduce the amount of food that they ate during a typical day. He pointed out that this kind of fast is *not* mentioned in Scripture but is also not condemned, so "it may have its use, and receive a blessing from God."²⁰ Some Christians chose to reduce the amount of food they ate even though they had no health issues. Wesley calls this fast "the lowest kind of fast."²¹

Getting Started: Are You Ready to Fast?

The same rule applies to fasting that applies to prayer and study: fasting should be intentional rather than haphazard. It should be a holy habit repeated on a regular basis.

Fasting presents a different set of circumstances than those created by prayer and searching the Scriptures. Rather than finding the time to *add* a practice, you will actually be removing something from your daily routine. As such, there are theoretically many more options for a rule of fasting than there are for prayer and study.

First, consider how you might fast from food. Will you skip one meal? Several meals? Will you fast one day per week or more than one day? Instead of skipping a meal, will you abstain from a particular food or particular kind of food? For example, will you abstain from desserts or other kinds of foods for a particular measure of time? A good way to decide what meal to skip or what food from which to abstain is to consider what you typically turn to when you are stressed. Do you eat sweets when you feel emotional strain? Consider eliminating sweets from your diet. Do you look forward to a particular meal because it offers emotional comfort? Consider skipping that meal for your fast.

Second, consider what you will do *instead* of eating. Will you pray? Will you read Scripture? Will you journal?

²⁰ John Wesley, "Upon Our Lord's Sermon on the Mount, 7."

²¹ John Wesley, "Upon Our Lord's Sermon on the Mount, 7."

Many people also fast from things other than food, such as television or social media. You might consider fasting from those things in the future, but the ancient Christian practice of fasting from food ties our understanding of our relationship with God directly to our immediate physical needs.

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*Spend some time considering your own practice of fasting. Like prayer and searching the Scripture, fasting should be an intentional practice.*

*How often do you fast from food?*

*What meals or types of foods do you fast from?*

*Do you fast from other things such as television or social media?*

*Why did you choose that particular practice?*

*What do you do instead of eating or engaging in whatever else you may be fasting from?*

*What has God taught you by fasting?*

*If you do not currently have a practice of fasting jot down some ideas you have about when you might fast, what you might fast from, and what you might do in place of the thing you're fasting from.*

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Fasting with Your Family

Because young children need a ridiculous amount of calories in order to make them bearable to live with, create a practice that doesn't require them to skip meals. Instead, help them choose a food that isn't terribly good for them in the first place and create a rule in which they fast from that food on a particular day. For example, you might choose as a family to fast from dessert on Sundays. Instead, you might choose to finish your meals on that day with a Bible story or devotion. Remind your children of Jesus' words that it's not just food that keeps us alive, but the Word of God as well.

If you have older children, you might choose to increase the instances of fasting in your household. Perhaps you will eliminate desserts on two days per week, or maybe even eliminate meat on a particular day.

Consider a fast in which you eliminate snacks on the weekends or on a particular day during the week. This is a great way to remind ourselves that we often reach for food not because we are hungry but because we are tired, frustrated, sad, or bored. In the cabinet where snacks are kept, keep a pack of index cards with Scriptures or prayers on them. When you have a desire for a snack, pull a card instead and read the verse or prayer on it. In this way you will be mindful of the ways you try to manage feelings with food.

If older children are interested in fasting from meals, help them create a rule in which they substitute something else for the meal. Perhaps they will use the time to pray a prayer of confession, to journal, or to read Scripture.

After your family has created a rule for fasting from food, consider whether there is anything else God might be calling you to fast from. Some families choose one night per week to keep the television off or to abstain from video games. Instead of those activities, consider other activities that require interaction as a family such as reading a book aloud or playing a game together.

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*If your family currently practices fasting together . . .*

*How often do you fast from food?*

*What meals or types of foods do you fast from?*

*Do you fast from other things such as television or social media?*

*Why did you choose that particular practice?*

*What do you do instead of eating or engaging in whatever else you may be fasting from?*

*If your family currently fasts but you would like to modify your practice, how is God calling you to do so?*

*If you do not currently fast together, jot down some ideas about how God might be calling you to fast, including when and from what you might fast.*

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V.

THE LORD'S SUPPER and WORSHIP

John Wesley would have never even considered the possibility of separating the celebration of the Lord's Supper from the Sunday worship service, and so we will treat these means of grace as one and the same.

One of the distinctives of early Methodism was Wesley's insistence that every Methodist participate in a small group of some kind. Those who were new to the faith might participate in societies. Societies met weekly to hear the Word preached and to celebrate the sacrament of Holy Communion. Those who were growing in their faith and desired accountability from their Christian brothers and sisters would participate in class meetings. Bands met together for even more intimate accountability.

Wesley was delighted with the way that these meetings functioned. In fact, small groups were one of the reasons that Methodism grew so quickly in its early days. Wesley's one concern, however, was that Methodists would substitute weekly worship with participation in these groups. He frequently reminded Methodists that "liturgical worship provided spiritual nurture that they would abandon at their grave loss."²² In other words, there was nothing in the world that could replace the spiritual nurture that took place in the context of worship.

The key pieces of worship that Wesley valued were formal prayers, Scripture lectionary, the keeping of the liturgical year, singing of hymns, and hearing the preached word. These elements maintained the order and objectivity of worship, decreasing the possibility that errant theology might find its way into the ranks of the Methodists. Of course, the single most important element of worship was the Lord's Supper, the "grand channel"²³ of grace for followers of Christ.

Preparing for Worship

Most of us are lucky to get the family dressed and into the sanctuary on time for worship, much less intentionally prepare our hearts for the experience. As a result, worship can sometimes turn into an event to be consumed in which we understand ourselves as the audience to be entertained by the worship leaders. We enter the sanctuary with a sigh of relief and the attitude that "I made it! Give me something good!" In reality, if we must name an audience in worship, that audience is God. The congregation is the set of performers who are acting out our adoration of God, and the worship leaders are simply

²² Maddox, *Responsible Grace*, 205.

²³ Outler and Heitzenrater, *John Wesley's Sermons*, 232.

whispering the lines to the congregation. Worship is never a passive event for the worshiper. We would never consider going onstage as a performer without preparing ourselves in some way for our performance.

What would worship be like if we prepared for it the way we prepare for a speech or for a part in a play?

Preparing Yourself for Worship

There are as many ways to prepare for worship as there are people. For some, the best way to prepare might be to make all of the physical preparations for Sunday morning on the night before: lay out the clothes you plan to wear, prepare a simple breakfast that can be heated up easily, and wake up early to cut down on the rushing about that often characterizes Sunday mornings in busy families. For others, the best way to prepare might be to focus on the spiritual aspects of worship: read the Scripture that is going to be the subject of the next day's sermon, pray for the Holy Spirit to be present to you during the worship service, or spend a few minutes in silence in the sanctuary or in another sacred place before the worship service starts.

Like the other spiritual disciplines, preparation for worship requires intentionality.

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*If you currently have a particular way to prepare your heart and your body for worship, write it down below.*

*If you do not currently have a particular way to prepare our heart and body for worship, jot down some ideas you have about ways God might be calling you to prepare for worship.*

### **Preparing to Worship as a Family**

A great way to decide how to prepare to worship as a family is to have a conversation about it. Start by talking about your family's theology of worship. You can consider questions such as

- Why do we worship?
- What is the most important part of worship to you?
- What is *your* favorite part of the worship service?
- Is worship supposed to make us different? How?

Then you can move on to discussing the best ways for your family to prepare for worship. Each family has its own habits and its own ways of functioning together, so how you prepare for worship will depend primarily on how your family functions as a whole. A good idea for any family, however, is to figure out how to slow down in the day leading up to, and in the morning leading up to, worship.

Here are some things you might choose to do as a family:

- Have everyone lay out their clothes on Saturday night. Check that the shoes fit and that the tights and pants are free of holes.
- At the evening meal on Saturday night, or before bed on Saturday night, read the Scriptures on which the preaching will be based the next morning. Discuss which part(s) of the Scripture the preacher might focus on. What would you focus on if you were preaching?
- Use your Saturday evening prayers as a time to ask the Holy Spirit to be present in worship with your family tomorrow.
- When you arrive in the sanctuary, kneel at the altar rail as a family and ask God to prepare your hearts for worship.
- During the service, each family member can point out times that they see themselves as performers, acting out their adoration to God.
- Make sure that everyone knows the Lord's Prayer and the Apostles' Creed by heart.
- After worship, have a conversation about what you experienced in worship. Was there a song that filled your heart in a particular way? Did the preacher say something that you hadn't thought of before? Then talk about how you think you might live differently as a result of that worship service.

*If you have young children*, consider having them stay with you during the entire worship service rather than attending a special children's worship. Give them a children's Bible that they can use to follow along with the Scripture reading, and show them how to read hymns from the hymnal.

*For older children, point out symbols in the sanctuary that you find interesting, or have them point out symbols that they find interesting. When you get home, research what those symbols mean to the Christian faith.*

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If your family currently has ways to prepare for worship, write them down below.

If your family currently has ways to prepare for worship, but you would like to make modifications, how is God calling you to do so?

If your family doesn't currently take particular steps to prepare for worship, jot down some ideas about the things that God might be calling your family to commit to.

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## NOTES AND QUESTIONS

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